ALICE BLYTHE

SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND

MARTHA TRENT

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"'The light's coming, are you any better?'"
(*Page 144*) *Frontispiece*

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A WAR TIME STORY

BY

MARTHA TRENT

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ILLUSTRATIONS

ALICE BLYTHE

CHAPTER I

BRINSLEY HALL

"KNIT two, purl two, knit two, purl two, knit two, purl two,—no, that's wrong—now what have I done? Oh dear, of all the—"

Alice Blythe broke off in the middle of her sentence and bent her head over her knitting needles. Her broad forehead was contracted into a perplexed frown, and her mouth puckered. There was a half woeful, half humorous expression in her blue eyes. She regarded the khaki-colored wristlet as it hung limply from its four steel needles, and sighed.

There was something ridiculous about Alice when she tried to knit. No one could decide just what it was, for Alice was far from a ridiculous person. She was a tall, very fair girl with a pair

of broad sloping shoulders that a boy might have envied, and a slim waist. On the tennis court, with her hair blowing about her face, and her eyes sparkling, she was beautiful. Major Chetwood, a retired Army officer, and a neighbor, called her "Diana of the Tennis Racket," and no one considered the compliment extravagant.

But even the Major, watching her as she sat doubled up like a jack-knife in a big winged chair, her knees almost touching her chin as her big white hands tried to manipulate the slippery needles, would have had to laugh. Alice laughed herself, but there was a note of despair in her voice. She got up and walked forlornly down the long room, her ball of worsted unrolling forgotten behind her.

"It's wrong again," she announced tragically from the doorway of the dining-room.

Aunt Matilda, a rosy cheeked, little old lady, looked up from the napkins she was sorting before the Flemish oak sideboard, and smiled cheerfully. Aunt Seraphina, who was packing a big trunk over by the window, laughed softly.

"What is it now, child, another stitch dropped?" Aunt Matilda asked.

Alice held out her work for inspection. Her aunt shook her head slowly. "You've picked one up this time, and this should have been a purl. Remember to watch the stitch on the row before, and if it's tied you'll know it's a purl stitch. Don't you see?"

Alice looked from her to the tangled knitting, and then laughed. "No, Auntie, I don't, and I never shall. What under the sun does a tied stitch mean?"

Aunt Matilda was about to explain, but her sister interrupted. "Don't bother with it any more, my dear," she said to Alice, "I'll rip out a few rows for you and start you right to-morrow. You've done enough for one day. Come and help me with this trunk. Andrew is going to call for it directly after luncheon, and my back is so tired with stooping over it."

"Seraphina, how will that child ever learn to knit if you keep ripping out her work and doing it yourself?" Aunt Matilda protested mildly.

Alice supplied the answer. "The child, Auntie dear," she said, "never will learn to knit. You hate to admit it even to yourself, but Aunt Seraphina, having ripped out this particular wristlet

every night this week, knows the signs, and she thinks I can be more useful doing something else. She's quite right, I can, and packing a trunk will be such a relief. What goes in it, old linen for Mother's bandage committee?''

''Yes, she asked us to look over our things a week ago. They need soft cloths very badly in the hospitals, she tells me,'' Aunt Matilda explained. ''It's surprising how many old worn napkins we had packed away. I'd no idea.''

Alice nodded, turned back the cuffs of her blue serge dress, and dropped to her knees beside the trunk.

Aunt Matilda and Aunt Seraphina, or, to give them the names by which they were affectionately known throughout the countryside, the Misses Brinsley, were not, correctly speaking, Alice's aunts, they were no nearer connection than third cousins. But, years before, when Alice was a very little girl and had made her first visit to the old house, she had adopted them as aunts, and aunts they had been ever since.

They were dear old ladies, kindly and gracious with an old world charm, and the broad low-ceilinged rooms of Brinsley Hall with their faded

chintz hangings made a fitting background for their gentle lives.

Although the old house, now almost completely covered by ivy, was not as pretentious as many of the great places in the surrounding neighborhood, it antedated them all, and its history and fame were a matter of pride to the countryside. Brinsley Hall had held its own in the strife of past centuries, was spoken of in the histories and guide books, and many were the whispered tales of the dashing knights who had been sheltered in the hidden chamber of the South Tower. It was hard to believe these tales sometimes, especially on a spring day when the meadows and fields of Sussex stretched out lazily in the sunshine. Even the broad, flag-stoned courtyard, and the old-fashioned garden with its serpentine wall that flanked the gray rambling house, seemed to laugh them to scorn. Only the old tower itself, still upright and grim, was left to support the burden of the splendid traditions. That is—the Tower, and Peter St. John.

Peter was a great nephew of the Misses Brinsley, and he had lived with them ever since he was five years old. When he was eight he had

discovered for himself the spring that opened the sliding panel in the Long Room behind the bookcase. The consequences of his discovery had been five hours imprisonment in the dusty, cobwebbed tower, before Aunt Matilda had found him.

No one ever knew what his thoughts were during those five hours, but whatever they were he maintained a solemn respect and awe for the tower for the rest of his life. Perhaps his awe lessened with the years at Boarding School and College, but the respect remained.

Peter was in the Royal Flying Corps now. He had been too young at the outset of the War to go directly to France, and he had been forced to fret away two years studying, before he could hope to attain the dignity of a pilot. But the time had almost come to an end, and it was the thought that he would soon be leaving for France that was uppermost in Alice's thoughts as she packed the trunk under the direction of Aunt Seraphina.

"Funny we don't hear from Peter, isn't it? Do you suppose he's going to just drop down out of the skies and surprise us?" she asked, carefully refolding a napkin so that it would fit in a particular corner.

"Gracious me! I hope not," Aunt Matilda said fervently. "It was quite bad enough when I had to think of the dear boy in one of those dreadful balloons, but now that I've seen him—" Her pause was eloquent; Alice laughed.

"Was it as bad as that, Auntie?" she asked. She had reference to the only time that Peter had flown out from Golders Green and landed in full view of his terrified aunts in the home meadow.

"It was, my dear," Aunt Matilda replied decidedly, and Aunt Seraphina added: "I dream of it at night sometimes, and I assure you I waken cold from fright."

"Poor dear!" Alice comforted. "Peter should not have come without letting us know well in advance, and I'm sure he won't again."

She had cause to be sure. After the aunts had recovered from that first shock of seeing their nephew "crashing to earth," to quote Aunt Matilda, she and Peter had arranged a safer meeting place. It was an open rolling meadow over a mile from the house. There was a big empty hay barn nearby that did very well for a hangar, and there they had met on many a clear afternoon. Alice caught her breath guiltily at the thought of

those meetings. Peter had not been content to volplane easily to earth, but had made his machine do many more terrifying stunts for her benefit. And furthermore, there had been times when Peter had gone up when he was not alone. Alice shut her eyes as she knelt beside the trunk and remembered her first glorious feeling of soaring up, up into the blue sky. That had happened weeks ago; there had been many flights since, and on her last one Peter had let her—

She opened her eyes wide and turned with renewed energy to her packing. What Peter had done was a sworn secret, and she didn't dare even think about it.

"There, I'm sure that's as full as we can get it, Auntie," she said a little later, "and if you find that any more of the napkins are worn out, we won't have any left."

"Nonsense, my dear, I'm not touching the good ones, and it's the sheets that have filled up the trunk," Aunt Matilda explained tranquilly. She always took everything that Alice said very seriously, and could never understand her when she teased.

Aunt Seraphina laughed. Then she said quietly: "I hope they'll help; your mother said they used such a lot, and, after all, a trunkful's not much for a big hospital."

"Mother will be tickled to death," Alice assured her.

"That is, if she has time to be; she works so hard and so fast that really, you know, I don't think she leaves herself time to be glad or sorry about anything, and Dad's the same way. Up all night sometimes. Thank goodness, I had here to come to. The house in London is about as cheerful as a museum, and when I fuss about it, Mother says, 'You're entirely too young to go into a hospital.' She really means I'm too clumsy. 'Why don't you learn to knit?' And Dad says, 'Better go down and visit "The Aunts," Cricket, you're getting too big for the house.' " Alice surveyed herself in the glass and sighed.

"Why can't I be nice and dainty and ladylike, I wonder," she said woefully.

"My dear!" Aunt Matilda protested. "You are ladylike."

"And a great joy to two very lonely old ladies,"

Aunt Seraphina added affectionately. "Isn't that a telegraph boy I see in the lane?" she added, "Do run and see what he wants; Andrew is so slow."

CHAPTER II

MYSTERY MEADOW

ALICE met the telegraph boy, who happened to be a very old man with white hair, and had to sign his book before he would give her the message. She tore open the envelope on the way back to the house, for the wire was addressed to her, and paused a moment to read:

"Will be down about five, meet me. Peter."

"Will be down," she repeated thoughtfully, "that means he's going to fly, and I'm to meet him at three."

It was part of their secret plot that they arranged their meetings by seemingly innocent wires, but "be down," meant literally be down, for if Peter had meant that he was coming by train he would have written "will arrive." And he always put the time a couple of hours later than he really intended, which gave his cousin a chance to meet him in the meadow, and go for a short

flight without causing any undue anxiety at Brinsley Hall.

Alice, after she had decided that she fully understood the meaning of the message, hurried back to the dining room. The aunts were waiting for her, both a little flustered and excited. The delivery of telegrams at Brinsley Hall had always been an event, heralding births, deaths or marriages, and they had never grown accustomed to Peter's careless use of them.

Alice's smile and flushed cheeks, however, quieted their fears.

"He's coming," she announced gayly, "later this afternoon."

"For how long?" Aunt Matilda inquired eagerly.

"Doesn't say," Alice handed her the wire; "maybe he's got his commission and is just coming down to tell us about it. Wouldn't it be jolly if he had? I *will* be glad to see him, it's an age since his last visit," and she shut down the trunk, strapped it, and tied on the tag in a flurry of excitement.

"I must see that his room is ready, poor boy, I'm quite sure he's not used to a comfortable bed,

for he always sleeps so late when he's here," Aunt Matilda said as she hurried out of the room.

"Fiddle sticks," was Aunt Seraphina's reply, "Peter always did sleep late whenever he could. I'm going to interview cook," and she bustled into the kitchen, her mind already busy with a list of his favorite dishes.

Alice was left alone. She picked up her knitting, and after another rueful glance at it, and the telltale trail of worsted on the floor, she went off in search of the ball.

Directly after luncheon she announced that she was going to take out her car and go for a spin. "I'll drop in at the Chetwoods', perhaps, and end up at the station in time to meet Peter," she finished.

"Very well, my dear," Aunt Matilda sighed helplessly, and her simple words gave the impression that the limit of her endurance had been reached. "If your dear father and mother see fit to let you go careening about the country in a dangerous automobile, there is nothing I can say, but I can't help being fidgety every minute you're in it."

"Poor Auntie," Alice laughed, "with Peter

driving an aeroplane and me driving a car you don't have much peace of mind, do you? But you ought not to blame Mother or Dad; it's really Gilbert's fault. When he went to France he gave me his car and told me to do my worst." Gilbert Blythe was Alice's brother, her senior by six years, and a captain in the British Army. "And so far I haven't killed a chicken," she continued cheerfully.

"Major Chetwood tells me you're really a very expert driver for a girl," Aunt Seraphina remarked, pride in her voice.

"Well I can't quite make up my mind to it," Aunt Matilda insisted; "it's not what I'd call a ladylike accomplishment."

Alice had risen from the table and was standing back of her aunt's chair. She leaned down and kissed her lightly.

"Don't worry about me, Auntie dear, and I'll promise to be no end careful." She kissed Aunt Seraphina on her way to the door, and hurried out to the barn.

Andrew Mucklewhaum, the old Scotch gardener, was busy digging up the flower beds. When she passed he touched his cap respectfully. Andrew

never wasted words nor changed his expression unless the situation absolutely demanded it, and then he was sparing of both.

"Master Peter's coming down to-day," Alice called cheerfully as she climbed into her car.

Andrew looked up slowly, nodded his head gravely, and went on with his digging. The remark would have remained unanswered if Henry, the green-grocer's boy, had not heard it.

"His 'e, Miss? you doan't say!" he exclaimed in broad cockney. Henry's family had only just moved to the country from the very heart of London. "Hi knows all about Master Peter, Miss, Hi'm goin' to join meself, Miss, soon's Hi'm h'old h'nough."

Alice tried not to smile at the eager face before her. "What are you going to join, Henry?" she asked as she pressed her foot on the self-starter.

"Same's Master Peter, beggin' your pardon, Miss, the H'elevation Corpse. Alf Gubber, you know 'im, Miss, 'is father's the blacksmith, 'e writes 'ome there's nothing like h'it."

Alice was forced to end the conversation there. She nodded brightly to Henry, wished him good-luck, and started with all speed down the road to-

wards the Chetwoods' place. When she was out of hearing she laughed long and heartily.

"'H'elevation Corpse,' oh, dear, wait till I tell the Major, it will cure his gout," she said to the throbbing engine.

Her call at the Chetwoods' was short. Muriel, the Major's niece, a girl of Alice's age, was out, and that supplied the excuse for not staying. She repeated the story of Henry, and before Mrs. Chetwood and the Major had stopped laughing she was again in her car and headed in the direction of "Mystery Meadow," as she and Peter called their meeting place. When she reached it, she stopped the car on the road and looked up expectantly at the sky, and waited.

There were many exciting adventures waiting just ahead for Alice, but nothing that was to happen ever quite compared with the silent thrill of those minutes as she watched and waited for the first glimpse of the little speck against the sky that meant Peter's arrival. She did not have long to wait this time. The little speck appeared from behind a fluffy white cloud, followed by the buzzing hum as the 'plane came nearer. Alice watched and held her breath. Peter was evidently in a

hurry for he omitted to glide and dip. As soon as he soared above the meadow he volplaned down at once. The machine landed as gently as a giant gull, and stopped near Alice. Peter jumped out.

"Hello, old girl! Thought I'd be ahead of you to-day. Got off sooner than I expected."

"So did I," Alice replied; "what's the news?"

"Tell me yours first. How are the aunts?"

"Wildly excited over your arrival. I left them turning the house inside out, and I heard Aunt Seraphina order a chocolate cake, regardless of expense."

"Bless 'em!" Peter said, grinning. "I say, Alice, we'll have to be very cheery to-night, you know, I go back to-morrow." He turned and became suddenly absorbed in his engine. "Got my commission at last, and my orders for France," he finished quite casually.

"Peter!" Alice's tone was a mixture of pride, excitement and horror, and she wanted to give vent to all three emotions, but she knew that that was the last thing Peter would want her to do, so she said quite calmly instead: "Good old boy, I *am* glad."

"So am I," Peter grumbled; "I've wasted

enough time. I might have been gone over a year ago. I was ready enough, if I hadn't been so beastly young."

Alice did not reply, she nodded her head sympathetically, and Peter helped her on with a big sweater that she had tucked away in her car.

"There you are," he said, laughing; "put on your gauntlets and jump in, I'm afraid this is the last lesson."

Alice took her place in the little seat, and Peter climbed in behind her, after starting the big propeller shaft. The machine rose gradually and the lesson began.

"I'm getting the hang of it, Peter," Alice said when they were back in the meadow again, and pushing the plane towards the barn. "What a pity you are going away. Of course, I'll forget everything I've learned," she added. She had a splendid color in her cheeks. It is cold up in the clouds and Peter had taken her up higher than ever before to-day, and her eyes sparkled from the excitement.

Peter looked at her approvingly. He was fond of his handsome cousin, very much in the same

way that he was fond of some of the boys he had gone to college with. People often spoke of the two as being like brother and sister, but they were wrong. They were comrades of long standing, and the very distant blood tie between them had nothing to do with it. Peter never felt that he must protect Alice from danger, and Alice never felt that he ought to. If there was danger ahead they met it together side by side, and shared equally the result. She would have indignantly resented it had he assumed the rôle that she permitted her brother Gilbert, and it must be said for Peter that the idea of such a rôle never entered his head.

When the barn door was locked, and the machine safe for the night, they took off their extra clothing and hid it carefully in the car, like two conspirators, then Alice slipped into the driver's seat, and Peter lazed comfortably beside her.

They did not talk very much on the way home. Alice drove the car slowly along the country road, and Peter, as he watched the rolling meadows that stretched out on either side of them, sighed contentedly.

"Anywhere especially you want to go before we turn in?" Alice inquired, as they came to the gates of Brinsley Hall.

"No,—home, James!" Peter answered with a flourish of his hand, and they turned up the drive.

CHAPTER III

THE LAST EVENING

TEA was waiting for them in the Long Room, so called because it ran the entire length of the house at the back. There was a big open fireplace at each end of it, but because it was war-times only one had a fire going. Aunt Matilda and Aunt Seraphina were busy knitting beside it, both dressed in rustling black silk, and Aunt Matilda's white head was crowned by a black lace cap trimmed with lavender ribbons. They were both sitting in cozy fire chairs, and a table bearing a big silver tray with the tea things stood near at hand.

Peter did not wait for Alice to put the car in the stable, but hurried into the house at once.

"Hello everybody!" he shouted, and took the three steps that led from the hall down to the Long Room at one bound. He kissed his aunts heartily, an arm about each.

"Great news!" he exclaimed cheerfully; "got my commission at last. Look at me well, I am no longer—just Peter—but Lieutenant St. John of the Royal Flying Corps, and my new address is France. Think of it! The Government has let me out of swaddling clothes, taken my rattle away from me, and given me a dear little, fast little, humming-bird all of my own to play with."

He chatted on, not giving his aunts time to protest, until he thought that they had recovered from the first shock of his news, then he pointed a grease-stained and stubby finger at the neglected tray.

"Tea!" he exclaimed, "tea under my very nose and you never even offered to give me any, and I'm so thirsty!" And he sat down on a low stool before the fire just as Alice entered the room. She saw by the expression of her aunts' faces that Peter had told them his news, and she took her cue from him.

"Who said tea?" she demanded. "Auntie, shall I pour? I guess I'd better, for I can plainly see that you are both too busy gazing at Lieutenant St. John's shoulder straps to pay any attention to food."

She drew up a chair and busied herself with the teacups.

"I want more sugar if that is for me," Peter demanded as she offered him a cup.

"Can't have it, it's war-time, and besides it'll make you fat."

"Oh, very well, but what a stingy dab of jam, and it's my favorite kind."

"It's not stingy, or wouldn't be considered so by a person less of a pig than somebody I could name, and it's all you'll get. This is the last jar of plum, and our preserves are running low," Alice said severely.

Peter accepted the plate offered him, and the banter went on. It acted as the two had hoped it would, to cover the emotions that Peter's news had caused his aunts. After a little their efforts were rewarded. Aunt Matilda patted Peter's shoulder and smiled.

"Let him have all the jam he wants to-day, my dear. We'll call this a special tea in honor—" her voice broke, but Alice was quick to notice it.

"That's right, spoil him! I suppose I'll take a back seat now, and I do hate playing second fiddle," she interposed.

"My dear, what are you saying?" Aunt Seraphina's eyes twinkled behind their mist of tears; "you won't be any such thing, and besides you don't like plum conserve, you know you don't."

They all laughed, and for the time the danger was past.

Perhaps it would have been kinder of Peter to have let his aunts have a good cry, but he was very young and he had a horror of tears. Alice understood how he felt, and she knew too that the aunts would feel very proud, later on, if they could remember that they had not broken down on that last day. So she did her best to keep them all laughing. But she had grave foreboding about the long evening still ahead of them.

It was Aunt Seraphina who set her mind at ease. "I sent Andrew over to the Major's to ask them to come over to dinner," she said, half apologetically. "Matilda didn't want company, but I thought you had so little change there in camp, you might like it."

Aunt Seraphina's idea of Peter's life beyond Brinsley Hall was a very small tent, very little food, and a terrible amount of work.

Peter laughed and kissed the pucker from her

forehead. "You did just right, Auntie dear. Who's coming,—anybody staying at the Major's?"

"No, there's just Mrs. Chetwood, the Major, and Muriel."

"Oh, well, they're only family," Peter laughed as he swallowed the last bite of toast on the plate. "And now that tea is over, how about a walk in the garden?" he suggested.

"You and Alice go, dear," Aunt Matilda replied; "it's a little too chilly for Seraphina and me yet; and besides with the Chetwoods coming we must attend to some of the preparations."

"All right, we won't be long," Peter nodded; "it's been a ripping tea, and I really feel it's only fair to dinner to go out and get up some sort of an appetite."

Alice jumped up, and the aunts left the room, their silk dresses rustling as they went up the three steps.

"Poor darlings," Alice said sadly, "I know they are just longing to cry."

"Nonsense, they're the best of sports," Peter protested; "they'd have no use for me if I stayed home and played slacker."

"I know, but you'll admit it's a shock."

"Of course, and they've stood it just as I knew they would, with stiff upper lips, bless their hearts!" Peter was silent for a moment. "I say, I'm glad the Chetwoods are coming, though, it'll make getting through the evening so much easier. Come along out in the garden, I've got a lot to ask you."

"What's the latest from Gib?" he inquired, as he opened the broad Dutch door that led out to the little brick terrace.

"Not a word for ages. You know he wrote Dad not to worry if he didn't write for awhile, and Mother's afraid he's doing something foolish behind the German lines. I wish we'd hear," Alice replied.

"I saw your mother the other day, and she looked tired to death. She's a wonder. She told me you were learning to knit."

"Now, Peter, stop. Just because Mother teases, you can't. I'm not learning to knit. I'm trying to learn, and there's a whole lot of difference. But tell me about yourself, do you know when you go?"

"Next week, I'm not sure about the day, but I'll let you hear in plenty of time."

"Time for what?" Alice inquired.

"Why, to come up to London. You are coming to see me off, aren't you?"

Peter looked offended.

"Your father said he'd take a day off just on account of it, and when you think that Uncle Robert is the busiest doctor in London to-day, I—well, I naturally thought that you who have nothing to do would come along too."

Alice avoided the point by asking. "Is he really? Good old Dad. But of course I'll be there," she added.

"Well, I should hope so," Peter remarked, slightly mollified.

"Who goes with you?" Alice inquired, as they stopped to look at the old serpentine wall that curved in a graceful "S" across the end of the garden.

"Oh, all the chaps," Peter replied. "I say, Alice, do you remember when we used to play hide and seek down here?" He laughed at the recollection. "You were a silly kid, you'd hide

behind one of the bulges of this wall, and think I couldn't see you. I remember once I called you an ostrich and you cried because you mixed it up with a giraffe, and your neck was uncommon long in those days," he added mischievously.

Alice laughed good-naturedly. "Yes, I remember it almost as well as the day you cried when old Andrew told you the ghost story about the man who died in the tower."

It was Peter's turn to laugh, but he didn't, he frowned instead.

"Funny the way I've always felt about that tower," he said wonderingly. "It's always seemed so sort of human to me somehow. Do you remember, when I was a nipper, the way I'd always say, 'I'll tell the tower on you,' when I was mad?"

"Yes, you were a bit of a telltale," Alice agreed calmly. "I always wondered what you thought the tower would do?"

"I didn't know," Peter replied. "I suppose I expected it to turn into one of those armored knights that Andrew was always talking about, and avenge my wrong."

They turned to look at the house as they talked.

For the most part the gray of the stone merged into the dusk of the shadows, but towards the south corner the tower rose silhouetted against the twilight sky like a grim sentinel.

Alice shivered. It was early Spring, and she had come out without a coat.

"Looks a bit eerie, doesn't it?" Peter said. "Come along, let's go back to the house; you're cold."

"And I've barely time to dress," Alice added.

Dinner that night was a very jolly affair. The Major did most of the talking, and slipped in some sound advice between his stories and jokes. Peter listened and decided to remember what he said.

After dinner, Muriel, a dark-haired, slender girl, a little older than Alice, played and sang for them. But it was not long before they were all settled comfortably about the fire, and the conversation turned to Peter's going. There was no danger of tears now, and they could afford to be serious.

"Will they let you fly right over the enemy's lines, Peter?" Mrs. Chetwood asked.

"I hope so," Peter replied.

The Major turned to his wife. "Certainly they will, my dear," he said impatiently; "what would

they be sending the boy over for, if he was not to go over the enemy's lines? I take it you'll do scouting work at first, Peter, won't you?" he asked.

"Can't say, sir; most of the men back from the front tell me they do just about as they please. They may be sent to scout, but sometimes they stop to have a little friendly chat, if they happen to meet a German machine on the way home." Peter felt rather proud at sitting up and talking to a retired Army officer, and was not prepared for the damper that followed his remark.

"That's all wrong," the Major exclaimed. "I hope, Peter, you'll never do anything like that. If you're sent out to scout, that's your job, and by gad, sir, you ought not to do anything else until your job's finished. Now when I was in the Army, young men—"

The Major was off on his favorite topic, and there was nothing for the rest to do but sit quietly and listen. Alice looked imploringly at Peter at the end of the fifteen minutes, and Peter winked. It was Aunt Seraphina who finally stopped the steady flow of his words.

"Is that your very best uniform, dear?" she

asked mildly as the Major paused once for breath, and the question was asked so gently that he could not take offense.

Peter tried not to smile as he replied: "Yes, Auntie, my very best, it's all brand new. Don't you like it?"

"Oh, of course, dear, I like it, but it seems so—so very sort of ordinary for an officer, quite like your old one."

They all laughed.

"It is like it, Aunt Seraphina, except for the wonderful stripes," Alice explained. "They make all the difference in the world."

Aunt Seraphina seemed to consider the point.

"Yes, I suppose they do," she said at last, "but I can't help wishing that there was something distinguishing, something different about *your* uniform, Peter,"

Peter from his seat on the stool took her fragile little hand and rubbed it caressingly against his clean shaven cheek.

"We'll put a distinguishing mark on it, if you say so, Auntie," he said, "just to please you. What shall it be?"

"I think a blue forget-me-not under the lapel

of your coat would be sweet,'' Alice teased, and the Major laughed uproariously.

Aunt Seraphina explained that she did not mean anything particularly, but she left an impression of gilt braid and tassels on the minds of her hearers.

''The Brinsleys have always been in the Navy,'' she ended with dignity, ''and the uniform is so much richer looking.''

''I don't see why the forget-me-not isn't a very sweet idea,'' Aunt Matilda said gently, and when the Major stopped laughing the talk drifted to other things. But Alice's thoughts refused to turn from the forget-me-not. She thought so much about it, in fact, that when the Chetwoods left, and the household went to bed, she slipped from her room and stole noiselessly to Peter's, and returned with his khaki coat under her arm.

CHAPTER IV

PETER OFF FOR THE FRONT

THE next morning at breakfast Aunt Matilda asked.

"What were you doing last night, dear child, that kept you up so late? Your light was on until way past midnight."

"Nothing very important, Auntie," Alice replied. "I was just fussing," and in the confusion of Peter's going the subject was dropped.

The aunts were very brave and splendid when it came to those last good-bys, and Peter felt a lump in his throat as he took his place beside Alice in the car. He waved to the two quaint figures standing in the old courtyard, until the high box-hedge hid them from view.

"I say, Alice, they're the finest of the fine," he said unsteadily. "Makes me feel like a perfect brute to be leaving them. Why, they've taken care of me all my life, been decenter to me than

fifty parents could have been, and now I'm repaying them by breaking their hearts."

"Rot!" Alice replied shortly. "You're going to fight for your country, and remember it's their country too, and they'd lay down their lives for it to-morrow, just as you would. I'll admit it isn't a cheerful proceeding, but you're making it worse than it is. 'Tisn't as if you were going from a selfish choice, you've got to go and they've got to let you, that's all there is to it—you talk as if the bally war was your fault," she finished angrily.

"And you talk as if you hadn't a drop of feeling," Peter said with disgust.

Alice pressed the foot that was on the accelerator down hard, and the car dashed ahead at a terrific speed. Neither of them spoke until they reached the meadow. Then Alice helped roll the 'plane out of the barn, got Peter's leather coat from the car, and held it for him.

It was a cold morning. The breeze from the Channel was raw and damp, the feeling of Spring that had been in the air the day before was gone.

Peter looked dubiously at the sky. "Wish I'd worn my muffler," he said gloomily.

He walked over to Alice, but just before he

slipped into the coat she was holding for him, he stopped to turn his collar up. As he folded one lapel over the other he saw an embroidered blue forget-me-not. It stood out boldly from its somber background.

"I say—what?—" he demanded, surprised beyond words.

Alice laughed, she tried hard not to, but Peter's expression was so utterly bewildered.

"You did that," he said, taking her by the shoulders, "but I'd like to know how you got my coat without my knowing it."

"Are you sure I did it?" Alice teased, "Maybe it was Auntie. It does look sweet, doesn't it?" she went on, giving the coat a little pat.

"Well of all the—you—" Peter looked again at the forget-me-not and laughed too.

"You can rip it out with your knife," Alice said when their mirth had subsided; "it won't leave a mark, and truly, Peter, I simply couldn't resist the temptation."

"Rip it out? Well I guess not!" Peter denied. "I'll leave it there for good luck, and every time I see it I'll remember my little cousin who has a nasty temper at times, but a good heart." He

put on his coat, pulled his cap well down over his head, and drew on his gauntlets.

"I'll write or wire you soon as I know when we leave," he said as he climbed into the machine.

Alice nodded.

"All right, I'll be up sure. Careful, I'll get out of your way. Good-by, and oh, Peter!" she had to shout over the throb of the engines, "I didn't mean all that rot I said coming over, I just did it so you wouldn't blub."

The machine was making too much noise for an answer to be heard, but as it skimmed along the ground before it started to pick up, Peter leaned over the side and grinned.

Alice drove back slowly. She stopped to do some errands on the way at Little Petstone, the nearest village to Brinsley Hall. It consisted of a few cottages close together on the main road, a blacksmith's shop, a school house and the church. She knew everybody she met, and she stopped to chat so often that it was nearly noon before she reached home.

The wire from Peter did not come until the beginning of the next week, but when it did arrive it left little time for packing. Alice got it in the

morning and was in London in time for tea. Her father met her at the station and took her home to the big house that faced the Park.

Peter had not exaggerated when he said that Dr. Blythe was the busiest doctor in London. He was. He had given up his practice at the outbreak of the War, and was now so occupied with hospital work that every minute was full. He was a kindly man of sixty with very clear blue eyes and black hair that was graying at the temples. Alice's mother was almost as busy as her father. She was a tall slender woman with large humorous brown eyes, and the rare quality of never getting ruffled.

When Alice reached the drawing-room she was astonished to find her mother there to welcome her.

"How ripping!" she said when she had kissed her. "I do feel honored. This is really quite an occasion."

Mrs. Blythe laughed and pulled her down beside her on the sofa.

"Why an occasion, Cricket?" her father inquired.

"Why, it's the first time I've seen both my par-

ents at the same time since the war broke out," Alice laughed. "Any news from Gib?" she asked gravely.

"Not yet," Dr. Blythe replied cheerfully, "but I've an idea we'll get a letter soon."

"What time does Peter leave?" Alice asked to change the subject.

"At eight to-morrow," her mother told her. "He's coming around to-night to say good-by to me, because I can't possibly get to the station, I have an appointment at the hospital."

"Are you going, Dad?"

"Yes, indeed, can't let Peter go off without seeing the last of him," the Doctor said. "Even if he is your mother's cousin, I'm uncommonly fond of the youngster. They'll be gone by ten, and I can be at my first appointment in time."

Alice looked wonderingly from her father to her mother. She was trying to adjust their new way of living with the memory of the old comfortable life before the war. She drank her tea in silence.

Peter came in a little later, but stayed only long enough to bid Mrs. Blythe good-by.

"I do hope, Cousin Maude," he said laughing, when he stood up to go, "that if I get wounded out

there, they'll ship me home to your hospital. Just think how ripping it would be if I opened my eyes, or perhaps it would only be one eye, and saw you bending over me, in that awfully becoming angel-white uniform of yours."

Mrs. Blythe smiled and put her hand on his shoulder.

"That's a very pretty compliment, Peter," she said, "but don't get wounded if you can help it. We've quite enough men in the hospitals, but there'll never be too many on the field."

Peter laughed.

"I see. In the hospital you're a care, in the field you're useful. Very sound advice, Cousin Maude, I'll remember."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Blythe protested, "no wounded man's a care in the sense you mean, bless them, we love taking care of them, if they didn't have to suffer. I was only trying to suggest that you take no unnecessary chances. Don't—don't be foolhardy."

"Oh, I won't, I'll be no end careful," Peter promised readily. "And now, good-by." He kissed her heartily and turned to Alice.

"I'll see you in the morning," he said; "mind you're on time."

"Oh, we'll be there," the Doctor assured him, and Alice nodded. There was something wrong with her throat, and for the moment she could not seem to speak. She heard the front door slam after him, and felt suddenly dizzy. Her mother and father were talking about other things, and she picked up a book and tried to read.

But she still had the same queer feeling the next morning as she stood in the station with her father, waiting for Peter. When he joined them, Stephen Hunt was with him. Alice had known Stephen all her life, for he lived not very far from Brinsley Hall. The sight of him seemed to clear away her dizziness.

"Hello!" she said, shaking hands with both of them. "Isn't it jolly to think you're going to be together."

"Rather!" Stephen replied.

"Where are your sisters? Are they coming down?" Alice inquired.

Stephen shook his head. "No, indeed. I went home and said good-by last week. You see, they're all awfully busy knitting, and one thing

and another, and they couldn't get up to town. Peter's the lucky one, being seen off in the proper fashion.''

Peter laughed.

''Catch me crossing to France if Alice wasn't here to wish me luck.'' And as Stephen tried to interrupt he said, ''No you don't, this is my party and you promised to talk to the Doctor if I brought you over.'' He took Alice's arm and walked her down towards the other end of the station.

''You'll write to me, old girl, won't you?'' he asked anxiously.

''Of course,'' Alice promised absently. ''And Peter, do write to Brinsley Hall often, the aunts will only live for the mails, you know.''

''I will, on my word,'' Peter answered gravely.

They passed a group of soldiers, and Alice recognized Alfred Gubber the blacksmith's son. She nodded to him and turned to Peter.

''Doesn't he look splendid in a uniform? I'll have to tell his mother I saw him,'' she said.

''Who, Alf? Oh, yes, he's a fine chap, works twice as hard as any other man in the company,'' Peter replied.

A stir at the train gates interrupted further con-

versation. The men were forming ranks. Alice and Peter hurried back to the Doctor, and Stephen held out his hand.

"Good-by, all 'round," he said, "looks as if we're off."

Alice shook his hand mechanically and turned again to Peter just as her father said: "Remember to keep your ears open for news of Gilbert."

"I will, sir. Good-by," Peter shook the Doctor's hand. "Good-by, Alice, be a good child, and go have a look at Mystery Meadow once in a while, just for old times' sake," he said.

"Good-by, Peter, and good-luck." Alice was herself again. "I will, and write when you get a chance, and of course, win all the decorations," she added laughing.

"Oh, naturally," Peter replied. "I've always intended doing that."

They shook hands and looked at each other squarely as comrades should, and then at a "Come along, old chap," from Stephen, Peter hurried to the gate, and Alice lost sight of him as he took his place beside the other men in khaki.

CHAPTER V

TWO LETTERS

ALICE had the rest of the day on her hands and nothing to do. She roamed about the house all morning, a prey to very unhappy thoughts. It seemed that in the whole of England she was the only person who was not doing something of real importance. The thought had worried her for a long time, but in the past she had gone to the hospital and read to the soldiers for an afternoon, or made a few surgical dressings for her mother, and that had always quieted her conscience. But the time had come when little deeds were not enough.

With Peter's going Alice suddenly realized that life was going to be awfully dull, and with the characteristic suddenness that always marked her decisions, she determined that she would find something to do, something of real importance, even if she had to work in the munition factories.

With this high resolve she went to the hospital

after luncheon to see her mother. Mrs. Blythe listened sympathetically, when she was not opening the door of the little reception room to answer questions. At the end of their talk she said:

"But Cricket, dear, you're so much too young to do anything that requires initiative."

"I'm nearly seventeen, Mother," Alice interrupted.

But her mother continued, "I can't have you going into things that I don't know about. Do be content with making surgical dressings, there's a dear."

And Alice knew that all her urging had been in vain. That night she besieged her father in his study. He was even less encouraging than her mother.

"You in a munition factory!" he exclaimed. "Rubbish! Why, Cricket, I thought you had better sense. Come, come, your brother Gilbert is at the front, your cousin Peter left to-day, and your mother and I are doing our share. You can afford just to dabble, at least until you're a bit older. Why don't you join one of those Girls' Societies for amusing the soldiers?" he suggested as a consolation.

Alice shook her head dejectedly. "That isn't real work, Dad, and you know it," she said quietly.

Her father looked at her inquiringly. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "You go back to the country and I'll keep my eyes open, and if I hear of a thing that you could do, I'll let you know. How's that?"

And Alice had to be content with his promise.

The next day she returned to Brinsley Hall, and for a while the task of keeping her aunts from thinking too much about Peter kept her busy, but all the time, as the days lengthened and the gardens were bright with flowers, the discontent in the back of her mind grew greater, and she gave up hoping that her father would ever find anything for her to do.

One morning, about two weeks after Peter had left, she started to go over to the Chetwoods, and see if Muriel could suggest anything. She decided to walk, because the day was particularly fine, and she started down the road at her accustomed pace. She had not gone very far when she saw the Postman's cart, and hurried towards it.

"Good-morning, any letters for us?" she shouted, for Mr. Hotchkiss, who had been postman

for many years at Little Petstone, was very deaf.

"'Morning, Miss," he returned eagerly, "yes, I've got a lot of letters for you this morning, Miss." He fumbled in his bag and finally brought out several envelopes of assorted sizes.

Alice took them anxiously and sorted them hurriedly. To her great relief and joy she saw that one from France was in Gilbert's handwriting, another in Peter's. She thanked Mr. Hotchkiss and turned back towards the house. She had left Aunt Matilda and Aunt Seraphina sitting on the terrace.

"See what I've got!" she said, as she crossed the lawn and hurried to them. "A letter from Gilbert and one from Peter, and there's another for you." She seated herself on the footstool at Aunt Matilda's feet, and scanned her brother's letter. "I haven't finished reading it myself yet," she explained, "but I'll start at the beginning again," and she read:

"Dear Old Cricket,

"It's been a long, and for me a very exciting time since I last wrote. I've done a lot of things that I can't write you about, but some day I'll tell you, though you'll hardly believe me, and I think I can see your

eyes growing wider in wonder even now as I write, dear old Cricket!

"I suppose you've read in the papers that we attacked Zandre the other day, and all about the way we joined the plucky little Belgians, and drove the Huns out, and had everything pretty well our own way. But I'll bet you didn't read that a very little girl in a black smock and sabots was the cause of our doing it, and deserves all the credit. There, does that make you curious?

"Of course, it does. Well, I can't give you many facts, but her name was Marieken, and she is only fourteen (and doesn't look over ten), and she has done more brave things in these past months than you can shake a stick at, among others, saving my life at odd intervals. She was wounded in the end, worse luck, and she's now resting back of the lines, and I hope getting well. There's something you can do for me if you will. I know the Mater's too busy, and you could do it better any way, because you were a kid too, not so very long ago. Send me a white dress for Marieken, with some blue ribbons on it. It's the only thing she wants, as far as I can find out. While she was delirious, after she was wounded, you know, she talked of nothing else, so she must really long for it don't you think?

"Do what you can, and as soon as you can, but don't get too flimsy an affair. You know what I mean. She's not at all a fluffy sort of child. Love to Cousin Matilda and Seraphina. (I hear Peter's out here, good for him) and an extra share for little Cricket.

"GIBBIE."

"Well!" Alice looked at the letter and then at

her aunts. "Did you ever hear anything so perfectly thrilling? She must have been most awfully brave for Gib to rave so."

"I can't imagine a young girl saving Gilbert's life. How do you suppose she did it; it's most extraordinary," Aunt Seraphina said.

"Poor little thing," Aunt Matilda murmured. "Now why didn't Gilbert tell us how she was wounded."

"I'll have to get the dress straight off," Alice went on excitedly; "I suppose a white linen would be best, with a smart blue belt. If I could only see her, I'd be able to tell so much better what to get. But gracious," she exclaimed, "I was forgetting Peter's letter."

She selected another envelope addressed in a very scrawly hand, and opened it hurriedly.

"Dear Old Girl," (she began)

"I've brought down my first enemy plane, and though I wouldn't admit it to any one but you, I'm feeling deucedly cocky. It was no end of sport, and I did wish you were with me, which reminds me.—Why don't you come out? There's lot of work that girls can do around the hospitals, and there are any amount of them here. Come along! It would be ripping to have you within easy flying distance. Don't read the Major this scrawl, because I wasn't really ordered to bring down that

machine, and he'd think I'd been disobeying orders, and don't expect me to bring one down every week or so either, because such a piece of luck as I've had only happens once in an age.

"PETER."

P. S. "Isn't it ripping to think that some of the American troops are really here?"

Alice stopped and looked out over the garden, her eyes sparkling. Her thoughts were soaring, and in fancy she was with Peter again in an aeroplane, only this time they were chasing a German machine.

A profound sigh from Aunt Matilda, and a whispered "Dear Peter!" from Aunt Seraphina brought her back with a start.

She left the rest of the mail on the table after hastily scanning a note from her mother, written to tell her that they had received news from Gilbert.

"I think I'll go for a ride, Auntie," she said, getting up, "I'm too excited to sit still, and it's such a wonderful day."

Aunt Matilda nodded and she hurried to the stable.

She drove to Mystery Meadow and stopped in her accustomed place. There was not a cloud in

the blue sky above her. She looked up instinctively, but there was no sign of the familiar little speck. Two thoughts kept running through her brain.

"If a girl of fourteen can do so much, why can't I," was one of them, and the other was the sentence from Peter's letter: "Why don't you come out here?"

They were neither of them suited to the peaceful dreamy summer day, but they filled Alice's whole afternoon to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

CHAPTER VI

MR. MUGGINS, AGITATOR

IN spite of the fact that Alice made a momentous decision on that particular afternoon, nothing eventful happened at Little Petstone for the following week. And to make matters worse, it rained, not a good, steady, honest rain that beats down hard for a little while and then stops, but a mean whimpering drizzle.

Alice stayed indoors most of the time, and spent hours staring out of the windows at the dreary gardens, and trying to form some plan that would make possible her firm resolve. But she was forced to abandon each new idea after weighing it carefully, and by the end of the week she had almost given up the decision itself. But Saturday dawned bright and clear, and with the sun her hopes revived. After luncheon she walked towards the stable, with the intention of taking out the car. She felt that a visit to Mystery Meadow might help to blow the cobwebs out of her brain.

She nodded to Andrew on her way, and was surprised to hear him speak to her.

"'The morn's morning' to ye, Miss," he said, the Scotch burr making his words almost unintelligible.

"Good morning, Andrew, it's nice to see the sun again, isn't it?" Alice said in reply.

"Weel, I couldna say that exactly." The old man was giving the subject his gravest consideration. "In a manner o' speakin' it is, I'll grant ye, but on the ither hand it's no' sa gude."

"But why?" Alice asked wonderingly. "Isn't the garden wet enough?—it *looks* perfectly drenched."

Andrew regarded her pityingly.

"It's no' the garden I'm referring to," he said patiently; "the sun, if it doesna come 'oot too strong will dae the flures gude."

"Then?" Alice looked inquiringly at him and waited.

Andrew spoke so rarely that she felt he must have something very important to say.

"There's ither things foreby flures," he said, "there's men." Then as if the conversation were ended he went back to his digging.

Alice did not move. She and Peter had learned long ago the only method of making Andrew talk. She pretended interest in a rosebush. There was a long moment of silence, then, "Men and slackers." He took up his theme as though he had never left off. "There's a puir body doon i' the village that calls himsel Meester Muggins—do ye ken him?" Alice nodded. She knew the man by sight, and she remembered her aunts saying long ago that he was no credit to the village.

"Ye do?"

Another nod from Alice.

"Weel then I'm verra sorra for ye," Andrew said sternly.

"What's Mister Muggins done?" Alice asked gently. "He doesn't live here any longer, does he?"

"Not in a manner o' speakin'," Andrew replied, "and it's no' what he's done, it's what he is —he's—" he paused to emphasize the words— "he's an agitator, that's what Meester Muggins is."

"Oh, is that all?" Alice laughed. "I thought he was a German spy at least. But what's Mr. Muggins got to do wth the weather?" she in-

quired, remembering the topic that led to the discussion.

"Did ye ever ken an agitator that didna hae a powerfu' secht o' words?" Answering a question by asking another is a Scotch trait and Alice was used to it in Andrew.

"No," she said, "they all talk a lot."

"Weel, Meester Muggins is no exception," Andrew continued, "and to-day being Saturday, and fine to boot, he intends talkin' frae a soap box for the edification o' Little Petstone. 'Twill be a sad secht, I'm thinkin'." He sighed profoundly. "I dinna ken what we're coming tae when an ill-faured creeter like that is allowed to talk against the Government, instead of fechtin' for it. Not that this particular man will last verra much longer," he added calmly.

"Why not? What's going to happen to him?" Alice inquired.

Andrew smiled, a grim smile of satisfaction it was, with only a hint of humor in it.

"Weel, ye see, he was telling me the ither nicht that after he had converted England, he was goin' to tak' a trip up to Scotland, and I'm thinkin' that once over the border—" the pause that followed

was more eloquent than words. Andrew's shoulders shook, and he smacked his lips in anticipation of the doom that awaited the erring Mr. Muggins.

It was not until Alice was halfway to the village that she realized that he had failed to trace the connection between the weather and the agitator.

"I suppose he meant that there'd be fewer to listen to him if it rained," she said to herself, "but it's hard to be sure about Andrew," and she laughed.

She noticed that there was more than the usual Saturday afternoon activity in the village, as she drew up before Miss Sweet's Notion Shop, and stopped her car. The people were all standing about the blacksmith's as if they were waiting for something. There was only a handful of people in Little Petstone, but they seemed to have gathered in one spot, and the effect was quite like a crowd. She did not leave her seat, but watched to see what would happen.

Before very long a man, dressed in a brown suit with a flower in his buttonhole, got out of a buggy and forced his way to the center of the crowd. Alice recognized him as Mr. Muggins, once of Little Petstone, but now of London. The

village people were suddenly silent, and Mr. Muggins' voice, husky from much talking, sounded from their midst.

Alice sat spellbound at first, and listened. The orator wasted no words, he began at once to denounce war. He denounced it in the name of everything he could think of, and he predicted the downfall of England in words so moving that they should have brought tears to his hearers' eyes. For the downfall of the country he blamed the Government. When he spoke of several prominent men, and traced their resemblance to some of the tyrants of old, Mr. Gubber took it upon himself to protest.

"That'll do, young man," he said firmly; "I'm a law-abiding citizen, and I believe every man has a right to speak his mind, but I've a son 'Over There,' serving his country and I won't have a word said against the Government, on my property."

Mr. Gubber was a large man with a powerful forearm, and as a rule his word was law in Little Petstone. Alice waited to see the crowd disperse, but to her surprise they did not move. Mr. Muggins started to speak again; his tone was a little

less strident, but encouraged by the support of his audience he held up Mr. Gubber as an example.

"He's proved what I said," he shouted; "hasn't the Government taken 'is only son?" There was a murmur of assent, and he continued, "I tell you this war is being fought by poor men's sons, while the gentry sit at 'ome and drink their tea."

Alice waited to hear no more. She started her car, honked her horn furiously and drove straight into the crowd before her, almost hitting the soap box on which Mr. Muggins was standing.

"There's not a word of truth in what that man's saying," she exclaimed, standing up on her seat, "not one word, and every one of you ought to be ashamed of yourself to listen to such rubbish. You all know as well as I do that every man that isn't a slacker is fighting to-day." She paused long enough to look meaningly at Mr. Muggins. "And they're all fighting side by side. Mr. Gubber," she spoke directly to the blacksmith. "I meant to tell you and your wife," Mrs. Gubber curtesied respectfully, "that when I went up to London to see Lieutenant St. John off, I saw your son. He's in the same company with Mister

Peter, you know, and he looked perfectly splendid in his uniform.''

Mr. Gubber's chest expanded with pride, and his wife said excitedly: ''Oh, did you, Miss, thank you, Miss, I take it as very kind of you, Miss. We hear grand news of Mister Peter in Alf's letters, beggin' your pardon, Miss,'' and the flattered little woman looked haughtily at Mr. Muggins.

There was a low murmur of laughter through the crowd, and Henry's cockney voice demanded:

'' 'Old h'on a minute and let's 'ear what Mister h'Edward Muggins 'as got to sye to that.''

Mr. Muggins, very red in the face by now, cleared his throat and coughed. ''Mr. St. John is only one,'' he replied defiantly, ''and I'm willing to grant he's an exception.''

''He is not,'' Alice denied hotly; ''there's my brother, Captain Blythe, and Lieutenant Hunt, that you all know. Just stop and think for a minute, there isn't one boy in this neighborhood that hasn't answered his country's call, and we ought to be proud of it. Many of them have been killed, but they died like brave Englishmen.'' There was an expressive pause before she con-

tinued. "No, Mister Muggins, you can't talk such rot in Little Petstone, and expect us to believe you, because we know that the only men who have time to sit at home and drink tea in these days are men who, instead of fighting, go about the country making silly speeches from soap boxes."

A cheer went up from the crowd. The old men shouted "Hear! Hear! and the women, who were in the majority, clapped their hands delightedly.

"What price Mr. Muggins, now?" Henry demanded jeeringly.

Alice smiled triumphantly as she looked at her opponent, then the unconventionality of her position struck her. "What would the Aunts say?" She was just beginning to feel a little uncomfortable when the cheering suddenly stopped, and she heard a voice exclaiming:

"Bless my soul; what's this?—most extraordinary—bless my soul! Why, it's Alice," and she looked down to see the Major pushing his way towards her through the crowd.

CHAPTER VII

A WIRE FOR THE MAJOR

"MY dear child, what does this mean?" demanded the Major, as he put his foot on the running board of the car. There was a twinkle in his eyes, but he tried to make his voice sound stern.

Alice attempted to explain. She pointed to Mr. Muggins who was at that moment busily untying his horse.

"He said such awful things, Major, that I simply couldn't stand listening to them, so I just pointed out how foolish his statements were, and, well, I had to stand up on the seat so that I could be heard."

"Bless my soul!" the Major began again, but Alice would not let him get any further.

"I think I have convinced them that he was talking rot," she said hurriedly, "so, of course, there's no reason to stay any longer. I've a few

errands to do, but if you can wait I'd love to drive you home. You walked, didn't you?"

"You, you little vixen!" The Major laughed in spite of himself, "if you think you can get out of it so easily as that you're mistaken. What do you suppose the aunts are going to say," he demanded on the way home, "when I tell them I found you standing on the seat of your car making a speech in opposition to Mr. Muggins, while all Little Petstone cheered you? Bless my soul! It was the most astonishing sight I ever witnessed; I couldn't believe my eyes."

"They aren't going to say anything, Major dear, because you aren't going to tell them," Alice replied coaxingly. "You see they wouldn't understand, and you do."

"Oh, I do, eh?" The Major chuckled.

"Yes, of course. You wouldn't have wanted me to let those poor old people believe the perfectly awful things that dreadful man was telling them; now would you? It—it wouldn't have been patriotic," she explained.

"Hum, well, maybe not," the Major admitted, "but look here, Alice, don't do it again; it's not ladylike, you know. I know it's done, but well,

I've always thought of you as sort of an old-fashioned girl, and I'd hate to see you filling your head with new-fangled notions."

Alice ground her teeth, and experienced the same feeling of rage common to all girls when the words "old-fashioned," or "ladylike" are applied to them. It is not that the girl of to-day doesn't want to be ladylike and old-fashioned, but there is something in the use of the words that ruffles the temper. Alice wanted to explain that it was quite possible to make a speech and be ladylike and even old-fashioned at the same time, but she knew the Major would not understand, so she very wisely dropped the subject and talked about Peter.

When they reached the Chetwoods' they found Muriel and her aunt on the lawn, and Mrs. Chetwood insisted that Alice stay for tea.

"We've seen so little of you, my dear, for the past week," she said. "Of course the weather's been wretched. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Not much," Alice replied, dropping into a wicker chair and taking off her hat. "I went up to London for a day or so and did something for Gilbert, you'd never guess what."

"Tell us," Muriel begged; "isn't it perfectly thrilling to think you've heard from him!"

"I bought a white linen dress for a little girl," Alice explained, and told them as much as she knew about Marieken.

"Sounds ripping, doesn't it?" she ended; "makes me feel awfully useless."

"I know," Muriel agreed, "there's no chance over here to do anything very exciting."

"Oh, you can't complain. Look at all the clubs you belong to," Alice reminded her, "you're knitting all the time, and you're always doing something useful, while I—well, I'm so big and clumsy and so detestably young that I'm no good for anything."

She spoke so feelingly that the Major eyed her suspiciously.

Mrs. Chetwood laughed. "Haven't you finished the wristlets yet, dear?" she inquired.

"No, not quite, but if Aunt Seraphina gives me very many more 'little helps, just to start me fresh,' they will be finished in spite of me," Alice laughed.

"I wish you'd join our Soldiers' Entertainment Committee," Muriel said. "We have no end of

a lark getting up plays, and they do enjoy it so."

"No, thanks," Alice was firm in her refusal. "I want to do something that takes lots of strength and all my time, but, of course, Dad and Mother won't hear of it. They think that because I was just a kid when the war started I'm still a kid now. They don't realize that you can grow a lot in three years. But don't let's talk about me," she added hastily as the Major said with a sly wink, "You might go out recruiting, my dear."

Alice pretended not to hear. "Tell me what you're doing, Muriel. How are all those Tommies you've adopted?" she asked.

The subject occupied them for the rest of the time, and Alice had risen to go, when Potter, the Chetwoods' butler, came out to say that the Major was wanted on the 'phone.

"It's the Telegraph office, sir, and I can't make out a word they say."

The Major hurried to the house and returned just as Alice was climbing into her car.

"Silly idiot," he fumed, "can't even read a wire and make sense out of it. Why that man Cherry was ever put in charge of a Telegraph station, I'm sure I don't know. He's about as fit for—"

"What is it, my dear?" Mrs. Chetwood interrupted mildly.

"I've been trying to tell you, haven't I?" the Major replied. "There's a telegram at the station for me from the War Office, and because it's Saturday they can't send it, and that man Cherry can't read it, so that I can make it out?"

Alice could not help laughing.

"I'll go down and get it for you, Major," she offered, "it won't take me long."

And before any one had time to protest she was spinning down the road at a rate that far exceeded the speed regulations of Little Petstone. She had not boasted in vain when she promised not to be long, for in an incredibly short time she was back and the Major was tearing open the message.

Major Chetwood, though an old man, and long retired from the Army, had in his day been an authority on some subjects, and no one was surprised to hear that he had been called suddenly to London on a matter of grave importance, which was to be discussed that night.

"You must go at once, my dear. I'll tell Potter to pack your bag," Mrs. Chetwood said.

"Go!" stormed the Major, "of course, I must

go, but how? This wire came this morning, there's the time marked to prove it, and I get it after tea, when the last London train has gone. A nice kettle of fish! How am I going to be there on time? It's not possible, even if I drive over to the Junction. No, I will have to stay here and twiddle my thumbs while a lot of men who know nothing about the subject make a mess of things at that meeting."

"No, you won't," Alice said unexpectedly; "if it's a very important meeting, and you really must be there, I'll drive you up in the car."

"All the way to London?" Muriel demanded incredulously.

"You couldn't do it, my dear, it's too late. It's sweet of you to offer," Mrs. Chetwood said nervously, "but it's out of the question; it wouldn't be safe."

Alice looked at the Major.

"By Jove, it's my only chance," he said slowly. "Do you think you can make it, Alice?"

"Sure of it."

"Then tell Potter to pack my bag." The Major turned to his wife, and Alice started the car.

"I'll go tell Auntie and get a supply of petrol,

and be back in fifteen minutes,'' she called over her shoulder.

Aunt Matilda and Aunt Seraphina held up their hands in horror, a few minutes later, when Alice explained what she was going to do; but when she laid great stress on the importance of the Major's getting to London on time they were forced to give in.

She snatched up a coat on her way to the stable, and called to Andrew, ''Fill my tank, will you?'' Andrew, methodical as ever, obeyed. ''And I guess I'd better carry another shoe for luck.'' She moved about the stable, hurriedly, and it was not many minutes before she was back in her seat again.

''Wish me luck,'' she said as she started the car. ''I'm off for London,—and oh, Andrew,'' she called back as she swung around the curve of the house, ''Mr. Muggins won't bother Little Petstone any more. I rather think he's headed north.''

CHAPTER VIII

THE RIDE TO TOWN

MAJOR CHETWOOD was waiting for her on the lawn, and Alice noticed with a smile that he was trying to soothe his wife's fears.

"All aboard!" she laughed as she drew up at the front steps and opened the car door.

The Major climbed gingerly in, and Potter settled his heavy Gladstone bag at his feet. Alice nodded and the car started slowly.

"Good-by, my dear," the Major said to his wife, "now don't be foolish enough to worry. I'll wire you from town. What did the aunts say, eh?" he demanded of Alice as they rolled along the smooth driveway.

"Not much. I'm afraid they're a bit worried, but when they see me back to-morrow, right as rain, they won't mind," Alice replied.

She let the car out a little as they reached the highway, slowed down carefully as they passed

through the village, and gradually increased their speed until, by the time that they reached the open country, they were going so fast that the meadows and trees were no more than a confused blur in the sunset.

"Is there any need for such haste, my dear?" the Major asked nervously, as they slowed down for a crossing.

"It's nearly seventy miles to town, sir," Alice replied shortly, "and it's after six."

The Major did not speak again. He clutched the side of his seat, braced his feet against the footrail and closed his eyes. He expected to plunge to a sudden death at any moment, and the thought that he would meet his end while hastening to serve his country was only a slight comfort. There were times when he thought none too kindly of Cherry the Station Master, and he prayed to be saved, if only on his account.

Alice meanwhile was enjoying herself hugely. Racing through the country at top speed was only a little less exciting than flying with Peter, and the added knowledge that she had a really important reason for doing it added to the thrill of the adventure.

When they crossed over to Surrey she switched on her lights. It was just eight o'clock when they reached the outskirts of London, and she slowed the car down to a moderate speed. She had never driven in town before, and she did not want to take any chances now that the end of their journey was in sight. There was little traffic to impede their way, but she did not attempt to exceed the speed limit.

The sight of the pavements, and the regularity of the dimmed arc lamps seemed to reassure the Major, and he relaxed a little and attempted to straighten his cravat.

"Where do you want me to put you down, sir?" Alice inquired. "I forgot to ask where the meeting was?"

"I think you'd better take me to my club, my dear," the Major replied. "My papers are there, and I've an extra hat. This cap is hardly the correct thing for this time of day, and I really must wash my face, you know. It must be quite black."

Alice nodded, and did not speak again until they had skirted St. James Park, and entered the little section of London known as Club Land. She drew

up beside the curb in front of one of the big square buildings.

"Here we are, Major, and I hope you won't be very late," she said cheerfully.

The Major turned and looked at her, and although it was too dark for him to see the smile that lurked in the corners of her mouth, he knew it was there.

"Alice," he said gravely, "I ought to be very grateful to you, but I'm inclined to box your ears. I have spent some of the most terrifying hours of my life, and you needn't pretend you don't know it, you little vixen," he added chuckling. "I suppose I needn't ask you if you can get home safely. I'll call around in the morning and see you. And now, good-night. I must try to collect my scattered wits."

"Good-night," Alice laughed. "Of course you'll go back in the car with me to-morrow?" she added.

"I will not, indeed," the Major denied; "that would be expecting too much of Providence. I will return to Little Petstone *by train.*"

Alice watched his shaking shoulders until the club door closed behind him, and then drove slowly

home. The streets were unnaturally dark, and only an occasional arc lamp pierced the gloom. She leaned back in her seat and looked up at the stars. No lights showed through the drawn window-shades, and the house loomed black against the sky. She half expected to hear the warning buzz of a German Zeppelin; it would have been a fitting ending to her day, but nothing broke the unnatural stillness. She hoped to reach home and find both her parents out; it would be easier to explain her sudden arrival in the morning. She could trust Jenkins to take her car to the garage and say nothing. She slowed up in front of the house and stopped.

"It certainly looks deserted," she said to herself, and got out hurriedly. She was just crossing the pavement when to her dismay the front door opened and a man came down the steps. She saw that it was Dr. Jepson, a very clever surgeon, and a great friend of her brother. He was home on sick leave from the Front and spent a good deal of his time at the Blythes' home. He and Alice were old friends.

"Hello, Michael," she said, holding out her hand, "where are you going to in such a hurry?"

Dr. Jepson stared in astonishment. "I say, Cricket, am I balmy, or is it really you?" he demanded.

"Yes, it is truly me," Alice sometimes disregarded the rules of grammar.

"Well, is it permitted to inquire what you're doing out here in the middle of the night?"

Alice laughed.

"Don't exaggerate, Michael, it's only a little after nine, and I've run up from little Pepstone."

"Alone?" Michael demanded.

"No, I just dropped the Major at his club. He had a very important wire about tea time, and you see the last train had left, and he really had to get here, because the meeting was awfully important, so I just ran him up in Gilbert's car."

"You ran him up! Did you say the wire came at tea time?"

Alice nodded.

"Then, my dear girl, you raced him up, not ran," Michael corrected her.

"Well, we did go a bit fast. You see there wasn't much traffic on the road, and—" Alice was trying hard to make light of the trip.

"Rather fortunate for the traffic," Michael said dryly.

"Let's go back to the dining room and talk about it, you must be awfully hungry."

"I am," Alice agreed, "but—er, are Dad and Mother home?"

"No, I dined with your mother, but she left right after dinner to go to some meeting or other, and your father's been out all day. I stayed to hunt up something in one of his books, and wrote some letters at his desk." Michael explained as they mounted the steps.

The astonished Jenkins opened the door for them, and Alice sent him off to drive the car to the garage, after he had brought her a tray from the kitchen.

Michael watched her eat, and smiled to himself.

"You've grown up awfully suddenly, Cricket," he said at last. "Why, it seems like yesterday that your hair was down your back."

Alice nodded.

"Mother and Dad still think it is, that's why I'm kept a baby, and not allowed to do anything," she said.

"What do you want to do?" Michael inquired.

Alice looked at him seriously for a few minutes, and then said impulsively: "I want to go to France, Michael, and I believe you could help me win Dad over, if you only would."

Dr. Jepson whistled, but he saw by Alice's face that she was very serious.

"I might at that, Cricket," he replied slowly. "I am going over myself next week,—"

"Come into the Library," Alice interrupted excitedly, "we can talk better there."

Michael did not leave the Blythes' until an hour later, and when he did, Alice had his solemn promise that he would say what he could to persuade her parents to let her go out with his Unit the following week.

After he left she went up to her room with a smile of satisfaction. She was just ready to climb into bed when her father returned. She heard him cross the hall and stop at the bottom of the stairs, then he called, "Cricket, come down here," and his voice sounded very stern.

Alice slipped on a dressing gown and stood before him a few minutes later in the Library.

"I happened to drop in at the club and met the

Major,'' he said after a silence that had lasted for a long time; then he laughed.

''Cricket, you ought not to have offered to drive him in, and you know it. And when I think of the time you made it in—well, it's a wonder you're not both dead.''

''But, Dad, he simply had to get here, and there was no other way,'' Alice replied gently, ''and you know I'm pretty used to driving the car now.''

''Yes, so I hear,'' Dr. Blythe looked at his daughter.

It may truly be said that it was the first time he had an opportunity to give her more than a glance since the beginning of the war. And he thought she looked very tall and strong as she stood before him in her white dressing gown.

''It's my fault,'' he said at last, and paused. ''The Major told me about the speech this afternoon, too,'' he added smiling.

''Well, I don't think that was very nice of him,'' Alice exclaimed, ''after I got him here in time for his old meeting, too. Wait till I see him.''

Her father laughed appreciatively, then he said gravely,

"Upon my soul, Cricket, I don't know what to do about you."

He stood up and put his arm around her.

"But it's too late to decide to-night, isn't it? So you'd better run along back to bed."

Alice kissed him.

"I'll tell you what to do, Daddy," she said gayly. "Ask Michael Jepson's advice to-morrow morning, and do just what he tells you."

"Michael! what does he know about it?" Dr. Blythe looked bewildered; but his daughter was half way up the stairs, and she did not stop to explain.

CHAPTER IX

OFF TO FRANCE

THE week that followed was a busy one even for war times. There were discussions and consultations that lasted late into the night, behind the closed door of the Blythes' library. Alice, tossing in bed upstairs in her own room, waited for the final decision, and sometimes felt that every one but herself was to have a hand in her ultimate destiny. She put her faith in Michael, and the results proved that she had not trusted him in vain. For Michael did succeed in winning her wish for her in spite of all opposition.

"She's determined to go, sir, so why not let her?" he said to Dr. Blythe. "We can arrange easily enough, you know that. I'll take her along as my clerk, or something. Once over, you know, even at a Base Hospital, she'll see enough terrible sights to make her want to come back in no time." As this was not Michael's first trip to France he knew what he was talking about.

"But she'll be in your way," the Doctor protested, "and this is no time to humor a child's whim."

Michael interrupted. "There's plenty to do, and I can promise you she'll really be useful while she's there. And of course as my clerk I can keep an eye on her officially, and Lady Harden will do the rest."

Lady Harden was a friend of Mrs. Blythe's, and in charge of the Base Hospital to which Michael was going.

"By the time I'm fit to go back to the front dressing stations, she'll be ready and glad enough to come home. See if she isn't," Michael added. He argued so well that at last the Doctor and Mrs. Blythe gave in.

"Remember, it's your doing," the Doctor said at last; and Michael left the house feeling very much like a man who suddenly finds himself holding on to a bomb with the fuse lit, without being able to drop it.

He saw little of Alice in the days that followed, for he was very busy and she went down to Little Petstone to say good-by to the aunts.

It was not until the Channel steamer had left

the dock that they had time to take stock of each other. They were standing side by side on the deck at the stern of the boat, to get the last glimpse of the white cliffs of Dover, when Alice said impulsively: "I say, Michael, you're no end of a good sport. I haven't had a chance to thank you properly, but you understand I'm most awfully grateful, don't you?"

The Doctor laughed. "Nonsense, Cricket, you know you always get your own way in the end. I just happened to speed things up this time, and well—I'm blessed if I know why I did it."

"But Michael, you're not sorry I'm going, are you?" Alice asked, a hurt note in her voice.

"No, of course I'm not." The Doctor was quick to reply. "That is, if you'll promise to be good and not get into too much trouble when I happen to be busy."

"Why, I won't have time to get into trouble," Alice protested, and then as she saw the worried expression on the Doctor's face, she said seriously: "Michael, you and I have got to come to an understanding. I thought you realized that I —well, no matter what I thought, I can see now that you just did this to let me have my own way,

and you don't think that I'm going to be any earthly use over there." She paused and pointed an accusing finger. "I suppose you think I'll get tired of it in a little while and want to go home. Well, you'll see how wrong you are."

Michael did not contradict. She had read his inmost thoughts, and he was embarrassed.

"I'm going to work hard," Alice continued. "I can scrub floors if I can't do anything else."

"But you're going in the official capacity of my clerk," Michael protested, grinning.

"Rot," Alice replied shortly; "you know perfectly well, Michael Jepson, that you never had a clerk and never wanted one. Of course, if you insist I am perfectly willing to try to keep your records for you, and I'll feed all those caged microbes you're taking over, if you like."

"Heaven forbid!" Michael exclaimed. "Don't you dare try it. I never let any one monkey with my records, and as for my new serum—".

"Well, then?" Alice inquired calmly.

Michael shrugged his shoulders in despair.

"Oh, scrub your floors, wash dishes, do anything, I won't interfere," he said laughing. "In other words, Cricket, have your own way. Only

promise me that you won't do anything very outrageous.''

Alice held out her hand and sighed, a deep sigh of contentment. ''I'll promise, Michael. I only wanted to be sure that you wouldn't interfere if a really truly chance came for me to do something worth while. And now that it's settled let's go see what the others are doing.''

They walked forward and entered the cabin.

Dr. Jepson was in charge of a Unit, composed of a few nurses who were going out for the first time, some stretcher-bearers returning after a rest in England, and several other people who filled various clerical positions. Alice did not like any of them particularly. The nurses were all older than she was by several years, and she had an absurd notion that they all knew she was only masquerading; so she stayed beside Michael and gripped his arm tightly as the French coast came into sight.

There was a special train waiting at Calais to take them south to their Base, but it was several hours before all the formalities, the necessary examinations and preparations were over, and they were ready to start. Dr. Jepson was very busy superintending the transfer of the luggage from

the boat to the train. Alice waited for him under a shed by the door. There were several boxes of supplies there and she selected one to sit on. She was alone and had time to look about her. Apart from the men in khaki, and the general state of desertion she did not see anything that looked at all like war.

Then the rumble of a train made her start, and for a second she thought that the others had gone on and left her; but she saw Michael, hot and dusty, a little way down the dock, and settled herself once more on the packing box. But in a few moments she sat up very straight and looked hard before her. She could scarcely believe her ears or her eyes. She heard singing at first, and then saw a long procession of stretcher-bearers come into view from around the station shed. Each pair carried a wounded soldier. Alice caught her breath as she looked. Men with their faces bandaged, men with their arms in slings, some whose faces were disfigured hideously, some who would never walk again. They all filed past her, their eyes fastened on the gray hospital ship that was tied up beside the dock, and they were all doing their best to sing.

Alice watched them being carried on board without moving. She had seen plenty of wounded soldiers in the London hospitals, but they always looked quite comfortable in their white cots. These men were different, they carried the spirit of war with them. She wanted to cheer, but there was an unaccountable lump in her throat, and she couldn't. It was partly the sight of the stretchers that affected her—she had never seen men carried on stretchers before,—but it was mostly the sound of their singing. There were only a handful of men, and they were singing because they were going back to "Blighty," but it was the first time Alice had come face to face with the dauntless spirit that is so characteristic of the soldier today, and it gave her something to think about. She hardly heard Michael's cheery, "Come along, Cricket," as he hurried her to the train. And all through the tiresome trip that followed—they were shut up in a hot, stuffy compartment, the windows closed tight and the blinds down,—she kept thinking of those wounded men, and the ridiculous song they had tried so pluckily to sing.

CHAPTER X

HELEN CAREY

THEY did not reach their destination until the afternoon of the second day. It had been a very slow, tedious trip, and every one except Alice looked thoroughly tired out on their arrival.

"I say, Cricket, you're so wonderfully fit that it makes me angry to look at you." Dr. Jepson said, as they climbed into the automobiles that were waiting for them at the tiny little station.

"Then don't look at me," Alice teased; "I told you I was a good traveler, and you wouldn't believe it. Please tell Dad how fit I am when you write."

"Well you must *be* tired, even if you don't look it," said one of the nurses crossly.

"But I'm not," Alice denied, "I'm hungry, though, and I do think it's awfully jolly to see the sky again."

The nurse looked at her shining eyes and felt a tinge of envy.

The hospital was an old Château, set in the midst of shady woods. There was nothing about it to suggest war, and Alice, as she walked through the great front door, felt a little impatient. Ever since she had seen the men on the stretchers the day before, her mind had been keyed to a high pitch, and she had been able to feel that the war was just around the corner; but now it seemed further away than ever.

Lady Harden, who was at the head of the Hospital, was waiting in the great hall to receive them. She greeted each of the nurses, and sent them to their respective rooms in a quiet business-like way. Alice entered last with the Doctor, and when Lady Harden saw her, she smiled for the first time.

"Maude's daughter, of course," she said kindly, and shook Alice's hand. "I haven't just decided where to put you, my dear. You'll want to be near the Doctor's office, of course."

"That really won't be a bit necessary," Michael explained hastily; "you see, I won't need Miss Blythe much of the time, and—"

Alice's laughter interrupted him. She was still

holding Lady Harden's hand. She squeezed it gently as she said: "What Dr. Jepson really means is, that he'd much rather I'd be as far away from his office as possible. He's deathly afraid I might some day disarrange his papers."

"But, my dear, I thought I understood from the letter I received that you were coming out to act as his clerk, and take care of his records."

Alice shook her head.

"Not really, Lady Harden. I came out to work. I just *had* to get here, and one excuse was as good as another. Isn't there something you can give me to do?"

Lady Harden looked surprised for a minute, and then she laughed. "Any amount of things, my dear," she replied. "I'm glad I understand. You see I thought you were coming as a sort of secretary and assistant to the Doctor, and well, of course, now I see. We've a young American girl here. She's a bit older than you are, I think, but she's splendid, and I know you'll like her. She's really doing two men's work instead of one slight girl's, and I'll let you help her. It's—it's rather hard work, you know," she added as she sent an orderly down to the kitchen with a message.

"That's all I'm good for," Alice replied, "and I don't care how hard it is, so long as it's real work."

Lady Harden nodded approvingly, and turned to Michael.

"I'm glad you are better, Doctor, but you mustn't be in too great a hurry to leave us for the Front. I'll take over your charge from now on," she finished laughing. "You'll find your office at the end of this hall, and there's no need of your taking up your duties at once. We're not very busy just for the moment."

Michael nodded. "Thank you, I'll go unpack, if you'll pardon me. And I'm awfully obliged about Cricket," he added. "I was beginning to feel rather guilty."

He picked up his bag and hurried down the hall, just as a slight girl, dressed in a very soiled riding habit, appeared from the other direction.

"Oh, here you are," Lady Harden said. "I've found some one to help you at last. This is Miss Blythe, Miss Carey."

The two girls shook hands and their eyes met in appraisal.

Helen Carey was the first to speak. "I'm awfully glad you've come," she said simply.

"Take her to your room, will you please, my dear. For the present, she'll have to stay with you," Lady Harden directed. "And now I must leave you. If you want anything particularly, Alice, I am always in my office between seven and nine." She smiled and walked briskly away, leaving the girls alone.

"I say, I hope I'm not inconveniencing you," Alice said, picking up her bag.

"Not a bit of it," Helen replied cheerfully, "my quarters aren't just what you'd call spacious, but there's an extra bed, and I'll be awfully glad to have some one in it." She led the way through the main hall of the Château, down a pair of stairs, out through a back door and across a courtyard to the stable.

"Do you mean to say you live over the stable? How ripping!" Alice exclaimed, as she followed.

"Well, it was the stable before the war, I suppose," Helen explained. "But it's not any more, it's a sort of convalescent ward on the ground floor, and a bunk-house up above."

She led the way up a spiral staircase to a small room furnished with two cot beds and a packing box.

Alice put down her bag, and after looking about her for a minute she sat down on one of the beds and began to laugh.

"Thank goodness!" Helen exclaimed with relief; "the last girl I brought up here cried for three hours."

"Cried?" Alice inquired. "Now, why? I think this is just about tip-top. I suppose it was the stable boys' quarters once. Oh, wait till Michael sees it," she added, and then slowly and between chuckles she explained who Michael was. "And now," she finished, "that I've told you most of my life's history, will you please tell me what you're doing over here?"

Helen shook her head. "If you're going to help me you'll find out soon enough," she replied, laughing. "I never worked so hard in my life."

"But why did you come?" Alice insisted. "Of course, don't tell me if you'd rather not," she added.

"Oh, I'll tell you," Helen replied, "but it's hard to know where to start. "You see, when the war

broke out, my brother joined, of course, and so did some of the other men of our outfit.''

''Outfit!'' Alice inquired.

Helen smiled and explained.

''Oh, I see, you live on a ranch in the West. How perfectly exciting! I know all about them because, of course, I've read 'The Virginian,' '' Alice said. ''Go on.''

''Well, I just naturally couldn't stand the loneliness of the place after the boys left, so I made Dad let me go East, and take a course in First Aid, but—I really didn't intend coming over until Allen came.''

''Is Allen in your outfit?'' Alice interrupted.

Helen flushed. ''No, not exactly,'' she replied; ''you see I'm—engaged to him, and—''

''Oh, I see, I'm most awfully sorry for being so beastly inquisitive. Do forgive me,'' Alice begged.

''Oh, that's all right,'' Helen assured her, ''I can't get used to saying it, that's all. You see we haven't been, very long. Well anyway, Allen came over with the Engineers, and well, you know when you suddenly make up your mind to do a wild thing, how it is?''

Alice nodded understandingly.

"Well, I made up my mind to come over. A girl I know was ready to start but suddenly lost her nerve, so I took her place. There wasn't time to ask many questions and I looked strong, and that's the main thing."

"But you aren't doing First Aid," Alice protested.

Helen held up two very dirty hands rough from work.

"I am not," she said smiling. "I found out that there were other things to do beside nurse, and I've been doing them. And of course, I didn't come as a nurse, but just as a helper."

There was a pause, in which Alice looked long and approvingly at the muddy khaki skirt of her companion.

"I think you're ripping," she said at last, "and I'm no end glad I've found you. You tell me what to do and I'll do it. I'm simply crazy to get my hands as dirty as yours. Wait a second until I change into something sensible, and let's start."

The change was soon made, and Helen began showing Alice the various tasks for which she was

responsible. They consisted in working in the garden, cleaning automobiles, and doing the left-over jobs that the few overworked orderlies could not accomplish.

Alice was very hungry when dinner time came, and she was only too glad to take Helen's suggestion and go to bed early. They would both have liked to stay awake and talk, but they were much too sleepy.

Michael Jepson, looking out of his window a little before eight o'clock, smiled as he saw the light go out in the turret room. "I'm not so sure I was right about Cricket," he said to himself. "She's made a pretty thorough start for her first day, I should say."

CHAPTER XI

A STRANGE REUNION

TWO weeks later found Alice still at her post, working hard beside Helen. Her hands had attained the desired rough look that she had so envied, and the whole hospital staff were learning to depend on her to do whatever they asked, willingly and without comment, as they had weeks before learned to depend on Helen.

The two girls had grown to be close friends, and when there was time for it they enjoyed exchanging confidences. Alice learned all about "Shoulders," the favorite cowpuncher on the Carey ranch, and was as interested in his letters, written vaguely from "Somewhere in France," as Helen was herself. Helen in turn took a lively interest in Peter and Captain Blythe. It was while they were discussing the latter one day that they made a curious discovery. They were both busy in the garden when the conversation took place.

"I wish I could hear from Gibbie," Alice said, as she rested a moment and leaned on the hoe. "I'm so afraid he's doing some risky stunt again. He's always poking about in dangerous corners, trying to find out things."

"He must be great," Helen said enthusiastically. "I love men that do queer things."

"I do, too," Alice agreed, "but it's most awfully aggravating when you know that your only brother has been back of the German lines and he can't tell you how he got there."

"Has he, really! Do you mean he dressed up as a peasant, or something?" Helen inquired. "How thrilling!"

"I don't know a thing about it, really," Alice answered, resuming her work. "We didn't hear from him for ages, and then I got a queer letter that only hinted at the most exciting adventures. It was mostly about the retaking of Zandre, that Belgian village, you know, and he raved about a little Belgian girl with an unpronounceable name; said she was the real heroine of the attack, and ended up by asking me to buy her a white dress with a blue ribbon. And that's every word I've

"'Why, that's the most thrilling thing I ever heard'"

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heard, except a note a little later saying he'd received the dress, and that Marieken was delighted with it. I don't know where he is now, but Michael's trying to find out for me."

Helen did not reply at once; she regarded a clod of dirt that she had just turned over, intently. "What did you say the girl's name was?" she asked at last.

"Marieken," Alice replied, "and her last name was DeBruin, I think. Why what's the matter?" she demanded at Helen's look of excited surprise.

"Why, that's the most thrilling thing I ever heard. When I was at boarding school last winter, I adopted a Belgian soldier, his name was Henri DeBruin, and the last letter I had from him he spoke of his brave little sister, Marieken. Do you suppose it could be the same one?"

"Why, I never heard anything so exciting! Of course it must be," Alice exclaimed. "How simply thrilling! Gib said in one of his letters that the brother had been wounded and was in the same village with his mother and little sister. Now if we only knew where that was. I'll try to make Michael find out."

"Do you suppose that if it wasn't too far away we could get a day off and go to see them?" Helen inquired.

"That's just exactly what I was thinking," Alice replied; "we'll find out anyway."

They returned to their work with excited vigor until the bugle summoned them to their midday meal. Just as they sat down to the long table an orderly came up to Alice.

"Dr. Jepson wants you in his office, Miss. Gentleman to see you, I think," he added. "There's a big gray car out front."

Alice jumped up excitedly and hurried across to the Château, and upstairs to the Doctor's office.

"What's up, Michael?" she demanded from the doorway, "any news from Peter?"

"Well, I like that! She asks for her cousin before she asks for her brother," a voice over by the window drawled.

Alice turned and looked. "Gibbie!" she exclaimed, "how simply ripping! I've been thinking of you all morning. Where did you come from?"

Captain Blythe regarded his sister in surprise.

"I say, Cricket, but you are grown up,—but how awfully grubby," was all he could find to say.

"Never mind that," Alice insisted. "Tell me how you got here. Michael, I believe *you* knew he was coming."

Dr. Jepson, at his desk, looked up and grinned. "I did, Cricket, in fact, I used every means I could find to get him here, and now I see I should have gotten Peter instead."

"Nonsense, I'm much gladder to see Gibbie, and you know it." Alice flushed. A new element was creeping into her thoughts about Peter, and she resented it. "I've a thousand things to tell you," she went on hastily to her brother, "so sit down."

Captain Blythe selected a big cozy chair, and Alice perched on the arm of it. In half-broken, excited sentences she told him about Helen Carey and their common interest in the De Bruin family.

"Are they very far from here, Gibbie?" she inquired, "and do you think we could go to see them? It would be such a lark."

Captain Blythe considered as he lighted a fresh cigarette.

"I say, that is rather a strange coincidence,

isn't it?" he said at last. "As it happens they are not far from here. If you can get off, I'll run you over to see them this afternoon. It's on my road and I'll find some way to get you back."

Alice looked appealingly at Michael. "Do you think we could?" she asked softly.

"How do I know?" Dr. Jepson replied; "you're not my clerk any more, remember, and from what I gather from Lady Harden, you and that Miss Carey are the only people who really work on the place."

"But, Michael, if you asked her," Alice teased, "we've really very little to do this afternoon."

"Ha, ha, I knew that was coming! Gilbert, that sister of yours is the bane of my existence," Michael replied sternly. "Child," he turned to Alice, "go and get ready. I'll talk to Lady Harden."

"Oh, Michael, you darling!" Alice exclaimed, and hurried to Helen to tell her the exciting news.

A half hour later they were sitting on either side of Captain Blythe, and the big gray army car was headed towards Fleurette.

"I feel as if I could pick out Henri from a hun-

dred soldiers," Helen laughed. "I've had so many letters from him, it seems funny to realize I don't really know him."

"He's rather a fine chap, I hear," Captain Blythe replied; "he was very shy the day I met him. But wait till you see my little Marieken,—she's the really important member of the family."

"Tell us what she did," Alice demanded. "Your letters about her have driven me crazy."

"All right," the Captain agreed, "you really ought to hear something about her really to appreciate her."

The recital of Marieken's bravery lasted until they reached the main street of Fleurette, and Alice and Helen were so excited that when the car stopped at the hospital they would not have been surprised if Joan of Arc, arrayed in a full suit of armor, had ridden out to meet them.

Miss Brooks, the capable American woman who was at the head of the Hospital, received them enthusiastically. She remembered Captain Blythe, and from Henri she had heard much of Helen. She took them out to the side lawn where Henri was sitting smoking contentedly with some of his comrades. Then she sent off a message to Marie-

ken, who was as busy as ever in the kitchen.

The meeting was a curious one in many respects. Henri was overjoyed at seeing his "Marraine," but he was very shy, and Helen did most of the talking. Marieken, on the other hand, was delighted to talk. She chattered to Captain Blythe in her rapid French, stopping now and then to answer a question from Alice, and laughed gayly at the slightest provocation. She held the Captain's hand all the time.

Alice felt like an outsider. She talked to Miss Brooks and some of the nurses, and tried not to feel jealous as she watched the others. But the thought that each one of them had won honor and respect by some individual deed of courage made her feel suddenly very unimportant. She did not realize that to both of the girls the chance had come. Marieken's in Zandre and Helen's back in the United States, and that perhaps her opportunity was waiting for her not far ahead.

Her unhappy thoughts were suddenly interrupted by Captain Blythe as he exclaimed. "By Jove! I didn't know it was so late. We must be going. Come along, both of you, I'll take you to the station. Miss Brooks says that the trains

are running after a fashion, and you'll get home sometime to-night. Don't mind going without your dinner, do you?" he asked laughing. "I'd take you back, but I have to report fifty miles north to-night, and I can't chance being late."

"Oh, it has been such a nice afternoon, Captain," Helen replied, "that I wouldn't mind going without fifty dinners. Good-by, Henri," she continued, taking the soldier's hand, "I hope I'll see you again soon."

"You are so very kind," Henri replied shyly. "You have given me so much of happiness this afternoon. And now—" he looked downcast, "you are going, and I have not so much as started to thank you for your letters of last winter. Always in the trenches I would say to myself, if some day I meet my little Marraine, I will thank her properly, and—now," he shrugged his shoulders, "I have been able to say no word."

"Nonsense," Helen laughed, "you've been thanking me all afternoon, and besides I'll see you again soon, and next time I'll see if I can't bring you some tobacco," she promised.

Marieken said good-by very politely to them all, sighed because they would not stay and let

her cook dinner for them, and finally kissed Captain Blythe on both cheeks. "You will come soon again?" she pleaded. "I think of you, oh, so much when you are up there near the guns, and sometimes I cry when I dream you are wounded."

Captain Blythe laughed good-naturedly, "I won't get wounded, Marieken, I promise," he said. "So don't worry your little head any more. Give my respects to Madame, your mother. I am sorry we cannot stop in the village to see her. And be good and dream nice dreams about the Inn at Zandre, and what sport we'll have after the war is over, instead of having nightmares over me."

Marieken nodded happily and ran to the gate to wave them out of sight as they sped down the dusty road towards the station.

Captain Blythe left Alice and Helen on the tiny platform to wait the arrival of their train. "You can't go wrong, and remember the name of your station is Avenon," he cautioned them. "If you can't get a lift, you'll have to foot it back to the hospital, but it's only a couple of miles."

"Good-by, Gibbie," Alice replied, "I wish you

didn't have to go so soon. It's been no end of a lark seeing you."

"Oh, I'll try to pop in on you again," the Captain promised. "In the meantime, though, I may see Peter. I'm going to his section. Any message?"

"No," Alice replied calmly, "just good luck, and tell him he's a bit stingy about letters."

The Captain looked at his sister, winked solemnly and turned to Helen. "Good-by, Miss Carey, I'm most awfully glad to have met you."

"Good-by," Helen replied, "if you hear anything about the American troops, why let me know, won't you?"

"Well, rather," the Captain promised, as he jumped back into the car and nodded to his driver.

CHAPTER XII

A SUDDEN DECISION

THE car started. Alice and Helen watched until it was lost from sight in a cloud of sunlit dust, then they returned to the platform to wait for their train, which was already two hours late.

"I'm hungry," Alice announced after a little.

"So am I," Helen agreed, "but it doesn't look much like food around here. At best we're two hours away from dinner, and we may be much longer than that."

Alice cast a despairing glance up the track. The rails glistened brightly where the rays of the setting sun struck them, but there was no sign of a train.

"Let's ask the station master when he thinks the train will come," Helen suggested; "he's in that little house. You speak French, so you'll have to do it."

More for something to do than from any idea

of gaining information, they went over to the tiny well-kept cottage and knocked.

The old station master opened the door. He was delighted to see the young ladies, but he could not tell them when the train was likely to come. It was all in the hands of the good God and the military authorities, who knew best, but he had faith that it would eventually arrive.

Alice thanked him in her best French, and she and Helen crossed back to the platform and sat down. They waited for an hour. The sun was almost out of sight behind the trees, and the clouds in the west were streaked with gold, but the glories of the sunset were wasted on Alice.

"If I don't eat something soon, I'll jolly well die of hunger right here on the platform," she said.

"It's getting awfully late, look at the sun," Helen pointed. "Do you think there *is* a train, or do you suppose it's just a fable?"

At this point the door of the little cottage across the tracks opened and the old man beckoned. "It is very late, even for the down train," he said when they went to him. "I took the liberty of

thinking you might be hungry.'' He pointed to a table in the center of his tiny room, on which stood a big bowl of berries and a pitcher of cream.

At the sight of them Alice used all the polite French phrases she could remember, and then resorted to heartfelt English.

''He's saved our lives, bless his dear heart,'' she laughed, ''and I can't say anything but 'thank you, Monsieur, you are very kind, and we are very hungry.' ''

''Never mind, when he sees us devour them, he'll understand,'' Helen replied.

They drew up two old chairs and were just seated at the table, the tempting fruit between them, when a shrill whistle made them jump to their feet. The train was at last arriving. Alice's look of despair as she hurried with Helen across the track was comical. The old station master could not suppress a chuckle as he ran to put down the gates.

The train slowed up at the station, a guard pointed to an empty compartment and helped them in hurriedly, and before they had caught their breaths they were on their way.

''That was the cruelest thing I ever had happen

to me in all my life," Alice groaned. "The thought of that fruit snatched from under my trembling lips,—it's—it's a beastly shame, and I'm twice as hungry as I was before."

"Never mind," Helen comforted, "we'll be back at the Hospital soon and then we will be sure of an uninterrupted meal, but I do wish that dear old man had had his generous impulse a little sooner."

They settled back into their corners and the train lumbered along. It stopped every few minutes, and at one part of the journey they waited on a siding for an hour. When at last the guard came to their compartment to tell them that the next stop would be Avenon, it was after eight o'clock. They were only too glad to get out, but as they stood on the little platform they tried vainly to get their bearings, for it was very dark, and the lamp that hung in the doorway of the station was the only light in sight. The station master, or mistress, for in this case it was a woman, eyed them suspiciously.

"We are from the Hospital," Alice explained, "and we would like a carriage to drive us there. Do you know where we can get one?"

The Frenchwoman shrugged her shoulders

characteristically and told them that there was any amount of carriages to be had in the village, but unfortunately the Army had taken all the horses. Alice translated as best she could to Helen.

"I suppose that's funny," Helen said, "but I'm too tired to see the humor of it just now. Ask her the road, I'm all turned around. We'll have to walk."

The woman pointed vaguely into the darkness, and they started off in the general direction. Once on their way they knew that if they kept straight ahead for two miles they would reach the château.

"And dinner," Alice added. "Oh, dear, I was never so starved."

"Well, cheer up, this little walk will give you an added appetite," Helen teased.

They trudged on in silence for awhile, and then Alice said suddenly: "Listen! I hear something. It's an automobile."

They stood still and waited. At first they heard a faint thundering noise that grew louder as the machine approached.

"It's coming towards us," Alice said dolefully; "what a beastly shame, I was hoping for a lift."

"It's more than one car, it's a lot of them. Do listen! Look, here they come, we'd better give them the road," Helen advised.

They stepped to one side as a train of five ambulance lorries appeared up the road. Their headlights were on, and they were moving very fast.

"More wounded," Helen said. "I didn't know they were expected, did you?"

"No," Alice answered. "Look!"

One of the machines was coming dizzily toward them, and they saw that it lurched from side to side. It was the third in line, and as they watched, it crashed heavily into a tree, scrapping the car ahead.

The others stopped abruptly and the girls ran forward. The machine was badly smashed, and the driver was thrown to the side of the road. The second car had stopped half-way up the bank a little farther on. Alice saw that the driver had fallen forward over the wheel. The rest of the cars stopped in their tracks, and their drivers hurried to the wreck.

"What's up?" Alice inquired; "we're from the Hospital."

One of the drivers turned to her. He looked very tired and dusty, and his voice was weak.

"Unexpected push up ahead," he explained; "we've been running for twenty-four hours from the dressing station to the Front Hospital. Now we're clearing that out, we've another trip to make to-night back here. Can we leave him with you?" He pointed to the limp form that Helen was already bending over. Alice nodded.

"Tough luck, being one car shy just now," he continued; "we haven't any too many as it is."

He walked wearily back to his machine, and the others followed his example. Alice watched them intently. None of them seemed to notice that the man in the second car was still in his seat. As they started off again, the drivers of the fourth and fifth machines shouted something, when the second failed to fall into line, but neither of them stopped.

Alice ran over and shook the man at the wheel. He was not hurt, but the shock of the other car hitting his had dazed him.

"Are you injured?" she demanded, as he regarded her wonderingly.

He was very young and he looked very sleepy. "What happened?" he asked.

"Doesn't matter," Alice replied shortly, "you're not fit to go on. Get out and go over and help take that man back to the Hospital."

The boy obeyed mechanically. Alice climbed into the seat he had just left. She started the engine, released the brake and drove a little way down the road. Then she jumped out and ran back to Helen.

"There's nothing wrong with this car," she said hurriedly, "and I'm going to drive it. Tell Michael I'll be back sometime to-morrow, will you?"

Helen was busy lifting the injured man, with the help of the other driver, but she stopped long enough to look at Alice for a brief second, then she nodded.

"All right, but be careful. Easy, lift him gently," she directed as she turned to the man.

Alice went back to the waiting ambulance.

CHAPTER XIII

A CRY IN THE DARK

A TRAIN of ambulance lorries, returning empty to their base, driven at full speed, and it was several minutes before Alice caught sight of car number five. She had had to make up for the time she had lost, and it was with a sense of having won a race that she fell into line and was able to slacken her pace to suit the car ahead.

She did not have time to analyze the sudden impulse that had prompted her to follow with the extra ambulance. It was enough for her to know there was something going on up at the Front, and that they needed all the help they could get. When she discovered that the driver of car number two could not "carry on" any further she had slipped into his seat with characteristic calm. Once in the seat the necessity of keeping her head clear and her hands steady occupied all her time.

Fear was something that Alice knew very little

about, and the ride ahead held no terrors for her. She did not have any idea where she was going, or what she was expected to do when she got there, but she did know that wherever and whatever it was, the car she was driving was needed, and she centered all her energy on getting it there.

For the first part of the trip the roads were good, and driving was comparatively easy. The lights from the lamps showed the road for a few feet ahead, and made queer ghost-like shadows against the blackness of the countryside. Alice had a detached sort of feeling that she was sitting still and the rest of the world was whirling by her on either side. The thunder of the cars ahead grew monotonous and the even throb of her own engine seemed to be a distinctive sound. She kept her eyes on the road and drove. It was too dark to see anything of the country, but she felt the nearness of trees, and knew that she was going through a woods.

A little farther on, the car ahead slowed down; she followed, and after a minute her lights showed up the outline of a bridge. The boards trembled under her as she crossed. The road beyond was full of ruts, and it was harder to drive. She

watched carefully, but it is not easy to avoid bumps when you are traveling at such a rate. After a while she gave it up and tried to follow in the tracks of the car ahead, it lurched and swayed as the road grew worse. At last lights ahead flickered in the darkness, and other noises, besides the thunder of the cars, came to her.

The car ahead turned to the right, and as she followed, her car stopped bumping. She was on a smooth road again, and the pace of all the train was considerably slackened.

"Either we're going through a village, or this it IT," Alice said to herself. "I hope it's IT."

It was not long before she knew, for one by one the cars ahead stopped and by the pale light of the lamps she saw that they were in front of a house that might once have been a hotel. She was undecided what to do, but she backed her car up as the others had done, and waited.

Several men in uniforms were hurrying back and forth giving orders, and every few minutes an ambulance from somewhere farther on would go past, driving slowly. She was just going to get down and explain to some one, when a voice shouted: "Cars one and two for the Front; you

can make it before dawn if you hustle, and you're needed. Carry on!—" and she saw the first of her train pull out and lurch into the road.

For a half-minute Alice was undecided what to do. The common-sense plan would be to explain and have another car sent in her place, but something stronger than common-sense urged her to go herself. Something inside her brain kept saying, "I can't be as tired as they are," and before she realized that she had made up her mind, she was on the road again, just behind the other car.

They sped along over the smooth streets of the town, took a sharp turn to their right, and were soon in the country once more.

This time the roads were worse than ever, and it was impossible to go very fast. Alice watched the car ahead, and it seemed to go down out of sight into a ditch and climb up the other side, every few minutes. She was beginning to wish that she had not come, when suddenly a sentry loomed up in the glare of her lamps, and she heard him shout: "What are you doing with your lights on?"

She did not stop to explain, but hastened to switch off her lamps.

"Guess, I'm in the war zone," she said aloud, and for a minute a cold creepy feeling took possession of her backbone.

It took her some time to grow accustomed to the darkness. There was nothing to guide her now but the noise of the car ahead, and she soon realized she could not trust to that, for another noise that she had been hearing for the last hour or so, and had thought was other heavy lorries, grew louder and clearer, and she realized with a start that she was actually listening to the guns. She drove on for a long time, feeling her way, and listening hard for the car ahead. When there was a lull in the cannonading she could hear the sound of the engine, and she did her best to follow it.

For a short distance the road was comparatively level, and Alice thought that if she could only reach the driver of the car ahead she could ask him to tell her what their general direction was. She slowed down to listen for a sound from his car and then speeded up as fast as she dared, to try to gain on him. She tried hard to pierce the blackness ahead, but she could distinguish nothing. She had to depend on her hearing. Just as she

thought that she could hear the other car a little more distinctly, the guns began again, this time in real earnest, vivid blotches of color showed to the north every few minutes, and the noise of the bursting shells was terrifying.

Alice had only one thought, to reach the car ahead at all costs, and in the stress of her excitement she forgot the road. Suddenly, and without warning, her car struck a rut and jumped to one side. The wheel in her hand refused to budge; then the back of the car swung around and settled into a hole.

Alice sat perfectly still for a moment and tried to collect her wits. She was shocked, and her knee was bruised, but she was not hurt otherwise. The car was balancing on the edge of a shell hole, and she decided to get out before it turned over. She had completely lost her bearings, and in the inky darkness she did not know from which direction she had come. She sat down on the ground and tried to think. She was not as frightened as she was angry. She did not understand that what had happened to her might have happened to any one.

"I've made a mess of things and spoiled an ambulance," was the burden of her thoughts, and the more she thought the angrier she became.

She buried her head in her hands, and the hot burning tears trickled down between her fingers.

"Won't help any to blub about it," she said angrily, getting up; "maybe the car isn't really smashed up, and I might be able to back out of that hole if I could only see."

She felt her way to the car and touched the hood, then she felt along the side and around to the back. The hole was not a very deep one, and her hopes were beginning to rise, when a sound from somewhere out of the darkness made her jump. She was surrounded by a din of noise, for shells were bursting only a little way to the north, but this sound was different; it was human. She waited, listening, scarcely daring to breathe.

It came again, a sharp cry of pain unmistakably, and in sharp contrast to the thunder of the guns.

Without a moment's hesitation she plunged into the darkness in the direction from which it had come.

CHAPTER XIV

PETER'S INSTRUCTIONS PUT TO THE TEST

THE cry had not come from any great distance, and Alice had not stumbled on for very far, before her shoulder struck against something. She put out her hand. Her first thought was that another ambulance had gone off the road, but to her surprise and amazement she took hold of something that felt like the wing of an aeroplane.

"Is there any one here?" she asked, unconsciously lowering her voice.

"Yes, over here. Where are you?" A voice very weak from pain replied.

Alice groped her way to the side of the machine under the wing.

"Right here; I'll find you in a minute." She felt along the ground and finally touched something that felt like an arm. It moved painfully under her touch. A man was lying at her feet.

"What's the matter? Do you know what's

happened to you?'' She inquired gently, kneeling down beside him.

''I got winged right under the shoulder. I think, but I made my landing— Oh!—'' A sharp intake of breath made Alice pause.

''Am I hurting you very much?'' she asked, ''I want to find out where you're hurt. Is it this shoulder? It's so beastly dark I can't see what I'm doing.''

''I know, it's been dark for ages,'' the man's voice replied fretfully. ''Who are you anyway?'' he demanded suddenly, and Alice felt his hand cover the pocket of his coat protectingly.

''English ambulance driver,'' she explained, ''and a pretty poor one at that. I ran off the road over there quite a while ago. Didn't you hear me?''

''Not till just now. The guns have been making such an infernal racket, and my shoulder's been a bit jumpy,'' the voice trailed off, and Alice knew that the man was suffering more than he would admit.

''Wonder if I could get you anything from the ambulance,'' she said slowly; ''perhaps there's a bottle of water somewhere.''

"Got some of that in my own machine, but I couldn't get to it. Think you could find it?" the man replied. "I am uncommon thirsty. I smashed my torch looking for it."

Alice left him and felt her way to the 'plane.

"It's strapped to the side of the seat," the man directed.

She found the flask and returned.

"There you are, be careful don't spill it." She lifted his head gently and applied the mouth of the flask.

A sigh rewarded her.

"What time is it, do you know?" the man asked after a pause.

"Almost dawn," Alice replied. "As soon as I can see things, I'll get you over to the ambulance and try to make you comfortable, we're almost sure to be picked up soon by a returning car from the Front.

The man's head had dropped back into her lap, and his voice grew feverish again.

"All very well for you, but I can't go," he said. "I've got to be back at headquarters before then. I've made that observation and I must get it to

them. This delay's a nuisance. Why don't we start?''

''What division are you in?'' Alice asked.

The man tried to collect his wits at the question, and gave her a name and number, which were strangely enough the name and number of Peter's Company.

''I see,'' she replied, ''I know Lieutenant St. John and Lieutenant Hunt of that—'' then she waited.

''St. John. Good old Peter, gone West; too bad.'' The man murmured confusedly. ''But why don't we start? I must get this news back to the Colonel.''

Alice's heart felt as if it had turned over and then stopped, as she waited. *''Peter gone West,''* she said, trying to understand, ''but, of course, he doesn't know, he's delirious, and I mustn't—I can't believe him.''

''What news have you got to get to Headquarters?'' she demanded, trying to rouse the man.

''Big formation of troops; I saw them. Marked my map and then—confound it, where's my map? You've taken it!'' He sat up excitedly.

"No, beg your pardon, I forgot you were a girl. What's a girl doing here?" His voice was steadily growing weaker.

"Oh, never mind that," Alice interrupted, "you're too sick to trouble." She put her hand gently on his shoulder to push him back, and felt that it was wet—a sticky wet. She knew that it was blood. "There must be an emergency kit in the ambulance," she said, "I'm going to get it. I'll be right back. Don't try to move."

She found her way to the ambulance and climbed gingerly inside. She could not see anything beyond the vaguest shapes, and the machine might turn over if she was not careful. It looked in the darkness as if it were just balancing on the edge of the shell hole. Once inside, she felt around and pulled out a blanket, and under the seat in front she found a bag that she thought must be an emergency kit. With these she stumbled back to the man. She slipped the blanket as best she could under his head and shoulders, and then started to unbutton his coat and khaki shirt. He winced with pain at first, but helped her all he could.

"If you can stop the blood I'll be better," he

said hopefully. "Know anything about nursing?"

"No," Alice replied, "but I've got a bag of stuff here and we'll do something."

The wound was not on the shoulder, but through the upper part of the arm, and with the man directing, Alice tied a tourniquet above and below the spot. Then she put on some soft bandage that she found, gave the man another drink, covered him with the blanket and sat down beside him to think. There were a lot of things in the kit bag, but it was too dark to see what they were.

"If I only knew what bottle had iodine in it, I'd put some of that on it," she said to herself. Then, as if she had a sudden inspiration, she exclaimed aloud. "The lights! Of course, the car lights, what an idiot I was not to think of them." She ran back to the road and switched them on. They looked very large and seemed to illuminate all the country. Alice was frightened by their glare; she looked hurriedly in the bag, found a bottle and switched the lights off again.

"What was that?" the man demanded when she returned to him.

She explained.

"I was stupid not to think of it before," she said.

"Oh, bother, you mustn't do it again," the man insisted, "it's dangerous; we're too near the guns, and they might start shelling us, and we can't take the chance on account of my plane—can't you understand?"

"Isn't your plane wrecked?" Alice demanded.

"No, my tank's hit, but I could make it on my emergency if my shoulder would only stop." He tried to sit up, but she pushed him back firmly and applied the iodine.

"Now listen to me," she said, when she had emptied most of the contents of the bottle over his arm in the hope of some of it finding the wound; "you lie still until the dawn comes, it can't be long. And don't worry about the map. I promise you it will be taken over the lines and delivered to the Colonel."

"How can you promise?" the man said fretfully, but his head sank back on her lap, and for a long time neither of them spoke.

Alice watched the sky in the east for the first

streak of light. Never had a night seemed so interminably long, but at last the black of the sky gave way to a faint gray, and the country began to take a definite shape. She saw the outline of the plane and her heart began to beat excitedly. The man beside her was lying very still. It was not light enough for her to distinguish any of his features, but he seemed to her more like a human being and less of a voice than he had seemed in the dark, and the fact gave her courage. She leaned over him and roused him gently.

"The light's coming," she explained, pointing to the east. "Are you any better?"

He tried to nod. He was very weak and his face showed ashy white against the dark blanket.

He looked at Alice in amazement, and she laughed nervously.

"Now don't start worrying and wondering who I am," she said. "I haven't time to explain, but do try to understand what I am going to say.

"First of all, I'm Peter St. John's cousin, and next, I know how to drive an aeroplane. If you have a message that is really important, I'll take it. Just give me your map and tell me the direction by the compass. I'll drag you over to the

road, and one of the other ambulances will pick you up."

The man looked at her in unbelieving surprise.

"Am I balmy, or are you really talking sense?" he said a little crossly.

"I'm talking sense," Alice replied. "You can't take the message, you're too weak; so why not let me try? I know you don't believe I can, but it's the only chance."

"No, of course, I don't believe you can," the man replied, and added fretfully, "I suppose I'll wake up in a minute."

"Well, I wouldn't wait for that if I were you," Alice advised. "It's getting lighter every second and I'd like to start if I'm going."

The man did not reply, but she saw baffled consent in his eyes. She jumped up with alacrity.

"Come along now, I'll get you over to the ambulance." She lifted him as gently as she could under his arms, and dragged, and pulled until he was just on the edge of the road. With a show of business-like haste, which she was far from feeling, she took a stretcher from the ambulance, covered it with blankets, and made him as comfortable as possible.

"Now tell me what to do," she said.

Without a word the man took a wallet from his pocket and handed it to her. Then in a tone as gruff as it was possible for him to use he gave her some directions. Alice repeated them after him clearly, slipped the wallet in the pocket of the sweater she had on, and walked back to the 'plane. On the way she picked up the gauntlets and cap that she found on the ground, and put them on.

"Now, Peter, what do I do next?" she whispered to herself.

Apparently no one answered her question, but Peter's instructions came back to her mind, clear and distinct. She started the engine, and climbed into the seat with a forced bravado. She knew that the man by the roadside did not believe in her, and the knowledge made her angry. She remembered what he had said about the tank being shot, and switched to the emergency.

"Peter, Peter, don't let me fall down now!" she begged. Again Peter seemed to come to her aid. Her hands acted mechanically as if under his instructions.

There was a whirring noise, a sudden jerky start, and then the 'plane bumped over the ground,

rose gently, skimmed the ground for a little way, and then soared up and up towards a bank of gray clouds that hung low in the east.

CHAPTER XV

A HINT OF DISASTER

WHEN Alice circled above the field of the Flying Corps Headquarters, a little later, the place was deserted, except for the men on guard. One of them noticed her 'plane and called to a comrade, and together they ran out to meet it.

Alice wanted to make a landing worthy of Peter's instructions, so she tried to volplane gently down, but she miscalculated her distance with the result that her machine ran away with her and she struck the ground before she intended to. Before she could stop it the 'plane crashed into a fence post and seemed literally to crumple up.

The men hurried over to the wreck, expecting to find the regular pilot at the wheel. Their surprise, when they discovered Alice, was so great that it seemed to rob them of the power to act. They stood about looking dumbfounded long

enough for Alice to recover from the shock and realize the sharp pain that was making her ankle throb.

"Well, help me, one of you," she said when she found her voice, and the men sprang to her. One of them helped her climb out. She tried to stand; a cry of pain escaped her, and she sank to the ground.

"Blime me, if it ain't a girl," one of the men exclaimed. "Here, mate, help me pick her up. Wonder how she came back in Lieutenant Grey's machine."

Alice was not unconscious, and she smiled in spite of her pain. "I flew back, didn't you see me?" she asked, trying to laugh. "Help me up, will you, I've an idea my ankle is broken."

The men lifted her clumsily, and between them she tried to hobble along.

"No use," she had to admit after a few steps, "you'll have to carry me."

"Where to, Miss?" one of the guards inquired, rubbing his eyes. "I sy 'ave I gone balmy in my crumpet?" he inquired seriously.

"To the Colonel, wherever he is," Alice directed, "I've got news for him, and there's no time

"She tried to stand; a cry of pain escaped her"

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to lose. I'll tell you how I got your 'plane afterwards," she promised as they lifted her between them.

Fortunately at that moment Lieutenant Hunt, attracted by the noise, came out of his quarters and hurried towards them. At sight of the group he stopped and looked even more surprised than the guards had.

"Alice Blythe!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Good morning, Stephen," Alice replied, and explained briefly the events of the night before.

Lieutenant Hunt did not let her quite finish. He took the wallet she handed him and ran to the Colonel's quarters, calling to the men to follow.

A few minutes later she was explaining all over again to another man with iron-gray hair, who was poring over the map before him while she talked. He was so busy, in fact, that he did not notice that Alice was swaying dizzily, and she would have fallen if Lieutenant Hunt had not caught her.

"What's the matter? Oh, poor child, what a brute I am!" Alice heard him say, and then for just a very short time everything about her was blotted out, and her head swam.

"She's fainted, sir," was the next thing she heard, and she knew Stephen was saying it.

"No, I have not," she denied stoutly, and tried hard to open her eyes, "but I've hurt my ankle, and I'm hungry—awfully hungry."

"Poor old girl, I should think you would be," Stephen replied. "Here, lie down for a while in the Colonel's bunk, and I'll find the M.D."

Alice was glad enough to obey, her ankle was sending shooting pains up her leg, and her head was beginning to swim again.

She heard the Colonel giving orders, and the men running back and forth. Evidently the map in the wallet had really been important.

She closed her eyes and did not bother to think any more until a grinning Tommy offered her a tin cup filled with something that smelled deliciously like broth. She sipped it slowly and her head cleared.

"Thanks a lot, that was awfully good," she said. "May I have some more?"

"Can she 'ave more, 'arken to her," the Tommy replied to an imaginary somebody. "She can 'ave h'all of h'it she wants," he went on. He

walked to the door. "Hi, Charlie, more chow for the lidy!" he called.

Alice drank four cups of the soup and felt better.

She was just finishing the last one when the Colonel returned with the doctor.

He examined the ankle and pronounced it a bad sprain.

"But I can't for the life of me see how you did it," he said as he strapped it with bands of adhesive plaster.

"I don't either," Alice confessed, "but I've given up wondering. I'm a bit confused as to what happened after I struck the ground, but I got here in time, didn't I, Colonel?" she asked.

"You surely did, my dear," the Colonel replied; "we had given up Grey as lost."

"I hope he's all right," Alice said, "I hated leaving him, but he was so upset about getting that map here, that I thought I'd better chance it, and now that I've done it, Colonel, may I ask one question?"

The Colonel nodded.

"Well," Alice began, "I've a cousin, Peter St. John, in this division, and I'd like most awfully to see him. Is he here?"

The Colonel glanced sharply at the Doctor for a brief second, then he said quietly: "I'm awfully sorry, Miss Blythe, but your cousin is back of the lines resting. He had a cold, I believe, wasn't it, Doctor?"

The Doctor nodded.

"Nothing to be alarmed about, I just sent him back because I thought he needed the rest," he explained. "He will never forgive me when he hears he's missed you," he added.

Alice smiled.

"Thanks," she said. "Lieutenant Grey kept talking about some one's 'going West,' last night, and well, of course, I knew it couldn't be Peter, for I knew I'd have heard if anything had happened to him. But well, you understand, I couldn't quite get it out of my head."

"Of course not, to be sure," the Colonel said hastily. "Poor Grey must have meant some one else, because St. John's all right, you see, oh, quite all right, except for this slight cold. Too bad he isn't here."

"Oh, if he's really all right," Alice laughed, "I don't mind so very much. He'd rag me unmercifully about that landing I made, and now

you see he doesn't have to know. Steve won't give me away, I'm certain, and you won't, will you?'' She looked up at the two men beside her, and laughed.

''No indeed, certainly not,'' the Colonel replied. ''I—I'll tell him you made no end of a fine landing, next time I see him, 'pon my soul, I will,'' he added and turned away suddenly.

The Doctor stood up.

''Try to rest a little, Miss Blythe, won't you?'' he said. ''That ankle may give you a little trouble, but I'll give you something if the pain gets very bad.''

''Oh, please don't worry about me,'' Alice laughed. ''I expect it's no end of a nuisance having me here, and I'm so sorry. Isn't there some way of getting me to a railway station and back to the Hospital? I hate bothering you like this.''

''Nonsense, my dear child, don't be absurd,'' the Colonel protested. ''You're not a bother at all, you mustn't think so an instant,—can't have it, you know—think what you've done.'' And as Alice tried to speak, he went on. ''You must stay quiet as the Doctor says. My quarters are

entirely at your disposal. I'll give myself the pleasure of having tea with you this afternoon. Now, now, not a word. If you want anything, my orderly will see that you get it. I hope I'll have some news for you when I return," he finished.

Alice was a little embarrassed by so much attention, but she thanked him and nodded to the Doctor as they left her. She was very tired and very drowsy, and it was not long before she was fast asleep.

She did not wake up until late in the afternoon. The Colonel's orderly was tiptoeing around getting ready for tea.

"Hope I didn't wake you, Miss," he said apologetically.

"No, indeed," Alice assured him, "it's high time I was awake, and I'm dying for tea."

"I'll tell the Colonel, Miss," the orderly said; "he told me to let him know as soon as you were awake."

A few minutes later, Alice and the Colonel were having the merriest time over the rather scanty meal. Alice told of the circumstances that led up to the adventure of the night before, and was

doing her best to make her host laugh. She was just recalling the episode of the station master and the plate of berries, when the orderly returned and announced, "Captain Blythe's compliments, sir, and may he have a word with you?"

The Colonel got up instantly and went outside.

Alice waited nervously. She knew, or thought she knew, exactly what her brother would say. After a short wait the Colonel returned with him.

"Your brother, my dear," he said.

"Hello, Gibbie!" Alice tried not to sound excited, but she was very close to tears.

Captain Blythe came over to her and took her in his arms.

"Cricket, Cricket!" he said, kissing her, "what made you do it?" He was almost sobbing.

"Why Gibbie, dear," Alice asked surprised, "it wasn't as bad as all that, and somebody had to bring the message, you know."

"Yes, I know," her brother said brokenly, "and of course, you never stopped to be afraid."

He sat down on the camp chair that the Colonel pushed toward him, and the talk turned to lighter subjects, but the Captain kept his eyes on his sister, and their expression was one of respect.

At last Alice said: "When do I go back to the Hospital?"

Gilbert laughed. "You don't go, my dear," he said, "you go back to England at once."

His voice was firm. Alice pleaded in vain; nothing could change his determination, and a little later she found herself in one of the service cars headed north instead of south.

As the Captain was shaking hands with the Colonel, she overheard the latter say, "Don't tell her until you have to, my boy."

She questioned Gilbert, but he answered her evasively, and after a little she gave up trying to find out what the Colonel had meant.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RETURN TO LITTLE PETSTONE

CAPTAIN BLYTHE was determined that Alice would have no time to ask him questions on the ride to the station. He kept up a lively chatter about nothing in particular all the way. Alice felt that he was forcing himself to be lively but she thought that he was trying to make her forget the pain in her ankle, and she did her best to help him.

"I wish I hadn't been so clumsy about that landing," she said ruefully, when they had taken their places in the train for Calais.

"If Peter ever finds out, he'll rag me awfully, and I really can't blame him, it was a stupid thing to do."

"Hum," Captain Blythe showed by his expression that he did not agree with her.

"You'd better be thankful that you got down at all," he said with spirit.

"Oh, that's one thing you're sure to do in an aeroplane," Alice laughed. "You're just naturally bound to come down."

The Captain looked at her for a moment in wondering silence, then he asked suddenly.

"Cricket, when did you learn to drive a 'plane?"

Alice hesitated before she answered.

"Well, you see, Gibbie," she said, "it's a sort of a secret between Peter and me, and he might not like me to tell, you and Dad are so terribly scared to have me do anything, and if I gave away this secret you'd always expect me to tell you all the others, and you see I can't promise to do that. I give you fair warning, there will be others to tell too, for now that I've really had a taste of adventure I am not going to sit at home, or at Little Petstone either, and just do nothing, I'm going to do any number of thrilling things all the rest of my life."

"For instance?" Gilbert inquired, smiling at his sister's seriousness.

"Oh, I don't know just yet," Alice replied, "but perhaps I'll have a 'plane of my own or perhaps I'll take up driving."

"Oh, I'd think up something better than that,"

Gilbert teased, "why not hunt big game in Africa, or go North and harpoon whales?"

"That's all very well for you to laugh," Alice replied, "but I tell you I mean every word I say, and Peter will back me up, see if he doesn't."

"I say," she added after a moment's silence, "it was rather tough luck my missing Peter, wasn't it? I'm rather cut up about it. That man last night kept saying such awful things about 'going West, and poor chap.' Of course they were not true, for Colonel told me Peter was back in rest billets, but somehow I still have that queer depressed feeling I can't exactly explain. You don't suppose—"

"Hello, here we are." Gilbert got up and walked to the corridor and looked out of the window. "We're pulling in, better get your wraps together," he said, and for the moment Alice forgot Peter.

But evil tidings travel fast, and Alice could not long be kept in doubt. By special arrangement Captain Blythe saw her safely started for England that night, and her father met her at Dover.

She was tired from her trip, and the excitement of reaching home, and the retelling of her adventures kept her mind occupied, but when two

days later she returned to Little Petstone, one look at her aunts' faces brought back all the vague misgivings she had had.

"Auntie, what is it?" she demanded, before she had taken off her hat.

Her father had brought her down by car, and with Andrew's help had carried her to the sofa in the Long Room.

Aunt Seraphina, who was busy trying to make her comfortable, caught Dr. Blythe's warning look in time, but Aunt Matilda's hand trembled in Alice's grasp, and she replied brokenly: "Oh, my dear, there's no use trying to keep it from you, I can't do it. Peter's—" she could get no further.

"There, there, Matilda," the Doctor comforted, "you mustn't give up hoping, you know." He turned to Alice. "We've had bad news, Cricket," he said gently, "and we wanted to wait until you were stronger to tell you about it. Peter has been wounded and missing."

Alice did not reply for several minutes, then she said slowly: "I see. That's what the Colonel meant when he told Gib. to keep it from me as long as possible, and that's why he acted so queerly

and flustered when I asked about Peter, and oh, Daddy, it can't be true—not Peter! Lieutenant Grey said he had 'gone West,' but that means—oh, I won't believe it—I *won't.*"

All her courage gave way and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Wounded and missing doesn't always mean dead, dear child," her father tried to comfort her. "It may mean that Peter's just a prisoner—we don't know anything definite yet, and you mustn't give way like that,—there's hope ahead. Come now, stop."

Alice did her best to suppress her sobs, but it was hard work. She understood too well the meaning of the message "wounded and missing," to put much faith in her father's hopes.

"Tell me all you know," she said a little later when she had dried her eyes.

"Nothing but the bare facts, Cricket," her father replied. "Peter went up the morning of the eighth—the day you were at Fleurette—" Alice shuddered, "and one of the observers saw his 'plane drop behind the German lines—that's all. Of course, Gibbie will do his best to find out anything more, and let us know."

"Then no one actually saw him killed?" Alice eagerly asked.

"No, his 'plane was hit by one of the enemy anti-aircraft guns and crashed to the ground, but they don't know positively that he was hurt."

Alice nodded.

"If there's a chance we must try to hope," she said bravely. "Perhaps we'll hear something soon."

"That's right," her father agreed, "I can't help but feel he's alive."

But days passed and no word came. Dr. Blythe went back to London, and Mrs. Blythe came down for a day. Alice's ankle grew better, but she could not walk on it, and the time dragged by in endless waiting.

The aunts did their best to smile, but their terrible anxiety showed only too plainly in their eyes. They made much of Alice as an invalid, and by waiting on her and inventing new wants every day they kept occupied and fought against admitting their worst fears for Peter.

To Alice the inaction was terrible. She was not old enough to accept the inevitable without protest; she wanted to be up and about, doing some-

thing or anything to make her forget. Lieutenant Grey's words rang in her ears day and night, "Poor old chap, he's gone West," and although she tried to keep up for the aunts' sake, she found it hard to convince herself that there was even a slight hope.

She had been back only a week, when a letter from Michael came to her. She was sitting out on the terrace in the sunshine when Aunt Seraphina handed it to her. She opened it eagerly to find that it contained another envelope addressed in Peter's handwriting.

Michael had written across, the back of it: "This came the day you left. I've just heard the news. I'm sorry, Cricket, awfully sorry—better not read this just yet."

But Alice disregarded his advice and opened the letter. Her hand trembled a little as she read the hurried, unheaded scrawl.

"Just time for a line to-night, as I expect to go up bright and early in the morning. There's something going on over in Mr. Fritz's back yard that we want to find out about, and I'm elected. The only trouble is, this particular backyard is so far away that, although I may get there, there's a very good chance that I may not get back, so this is sort of a 'last line before the battle' letter.

"Do you know, Alice, I've been thinking about you all day, and well, if I might have one wish to-night it would be to see you for a little while—there, does that sound awfully rubbishy to you? I suppose it does; or perhaps now that you're out here too, you've gotten to look at things differently, same as I have. I never felt sentimental before, so I can't be sure, but I think that's what's the matter with me. Anyway I'm a whole lot changed, and as I said before I wish I could be with you. I have a notion I'd like to see the way your hair grows over your left ear. Considering the opportunities I've had to observe it in the past without taking advantage of them, shows that I am either coming down with a fever or just plain balmy—I'll leave you to judge which. Wish me luck, I'm trusting to the blue forget-me-not to see me through.

"Yours,

"PETER.

P. S. "Alf. Gubber has been taken prisoner—tough luck, isn't it. Hunt sends his best regards.

"P."

Alice let the letter drop to her lap and looked out over the garden. Her eyes were blinded by hot tears. Peter had never written her a letter like that before, and she had never wanted him to, at least not until lately. She wondered if it were true that going "out there" did change people. She heard Aunt Seraphina in the Long Room, and hastily hid the letter, and explained that it was just a note from Michael.

"He says that Alf Gubber has been taken prisoner," she said. "I wonder if his family know it."

"I'll send Andrew down to see," Aunt Seraphina replied. "His poor mother will be so upset, I'd go myself only—"

"No, you stay here, dear, it's too warm for you to venture so far, and it would only distress you," Alice interrupted, "I'll go."

"But, my dear, your ankle."

"Oh, bother my ankle!" Alice tried to laugh; "it's really much better, and Andrew can lift me into the car and go with me. I'll only drive at a snail's pace, I promise, and I really think it would do me good."

Aunt Seraphina was never proof against Alice's coaxing, and she had to admit that it was tiresome to have to stay so long in the house. So after luncheon Andrew helped Alice hop out to the barn, and took his place beside her in the car.

"It's not hard to drive if you have one good foot and two good hands," Alice said as they started, "so you needn't be worried, Andrew, I won't upset you."

"That's as may be," Andrew replied compos-

edly, "but I maun say, lassie, I've mair faith in you wi' ane foot than wi' many that has twa."

Alice could not help being pleased at so flattering a compliment. She laughed merrily, and after they had gone a little way something of the old color came back to her cheeks.

Mrs. Gubber was at home in her little cottage when they reached the village. Alice hobbled into the tiny best parlor, and after a little she induced her hostess to sit down beside her on the sofa.

"What have you heard from Alf?" she inquired after they had exchanged greetings.

Mrs. Gubber's face fell.

"He's been taken a prisoner, Miss," she replied; "we had a wire from the War Office last week telling us so."

"I knew it," Alice explained, "but I thought perhaps you hadn't heard. I'm so sorry."

"Mr. Gubber says as how we ought to be thankful he's livin'," Mrs. Gubber went on sadly, "but oh, Miss, when you think of the way those Germans treat their prisoners, I can't help but be downhearted."

"Of course, you can't," Alice comforted, "but

just the same, it is good to know he's alive, and I've an idea that Alf can look after himself," she added.

Mrs. Gubber smiled. "Oh, Alf's no coward, Miss, if I do say it, he always was a great one to hold his own. But little difference it makes, I guess, if he's in one of those prison camps, whether he's brave or not."

Alice was about to reply, when she looked up to see Mr. Gubber standing in the doorway, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Good news, Mother!" he said, "here's a letter from our Alf." Then as he saw Alice he added, "How are you, Miss?"

"Oh, much better," Alice replied, "what does Alf say? Do tell us quick."

Mr. Gubber handed her a very dirty card. It was stamped with the German censor stamp, and the writing was so smeared that it was almost illegible.

"Maybe you can make more out of it than I can," Mr. Gubber said, "I see it's from Alf, but the rest is too much for my eyes. I thought maybe Mother could get it better than me."

Alice took the card and looked at it. There

was an impatient silence while she tried to make out the message. At last she read:

"'I am a prisoner—but well and so don't worry. There is a lot of us here together. Food is scarce, send some to—'"

Alice stopped.

"That address is almost impossible to make out, but I think we can get it if we see it under a magnifying glass," she said.

"Yes, yes, go on, what's next," Mrs. Gubber asked excitedly.

"'And I will get it sure,'" Alice continued reading. "'I see Mr. P. a—'

"The rest is blotted out," Alice said, "except, "'Your loving son, Alf.'"

Her voice was tense. She stood up and caught hold of Mr. Gubber's arm.

"Do you think Alf means Peter by that 'Mr. P'?" she asked excitedly.

"Why, yes, Miss, I'm sure he does," Mrs. Gubber cried. "Why, who else could he mean?" She looked appealingly at her husband.

Mr. Gubber went over to the family Bible that stood on the table and took out a small package of letters.

"He always does speak of him as 'Mr. P.', Miss," he explained.

Alice took the letters from him, as he took them out of their envelopes, and scanned them hurriedly. There was a fair sprinkling of "Mr. P's" through them all. She was so dizzy with the sudden excitement that she could hardly stand.

"He's alive, Miss, he must be!" Mrs. Gubber said excitedly. "Do go straight home and tell your dear aunts."

Alice regained her self-control with an effort, and forced herself to say calmly: "No, that's the last thing we must do. Don't tell any one. If it turned out not to be true, it would kill them—can't you see?"

"You're right, Miss, we mustn't be too hasty," Mr. Gubber said. "And now I'll go call Andrew to help you back to your car. You look like you needed a bit of air."

CHAPTER XVII

LIEUTENANT WHITE

FOR the rest of the day Alice kept her news to herself, but it was the hardest thing she had ever done in her life. Every time that her aunts spoke to her, and she saw the hurt look in their eyes, she was tempted to tell everything; but the thought of their grief, if her surmise did not prove to be right, kept her from doing it.

All afternoon she sat in the garden trying to think it out. She read and reread Alf's card, and studied it under a magnifying glass, but beyond the words, "I see Mr. P. a" she could make out nothing, and that might mean anything. If, as she hoped, it meant, "I see Mr. P. a lot," then why didn't Peter write for himself? Was he wounded, or had he written, and his letter not reached them?

The thoughts tormented her and she could feel sure of nothing.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, she decided to send for her father or mother. Either of them could advise her what to do. Then she wrote a long letter to Gilbert, asking him to do what he could to make sure. Directly after luncheon, she and Andrew started out in the car, ostensibly to post her letters, but really to send off the wire to Dr. Blythe.

A sudden impulse made Alice decide, before they had reached the village, to confide in the old Scotchman beside her. She told him all she knew and showed him the card.

Andrew did not reply at once. He sat thinking for a long while.

"It's queer," he said at last; "I dinna pretend to understand it, but lassie, if I were you, I wouldna send off that wire to your father, or the letter to the Captain. I'd bide a wee and see what happens."

Alice considered. There was something in Andrew's firm voice and look that made her feel that she would be wise to take his advice.

"It's going to be awfully hard to wait," she said.

Andrew nodded understandingly.

"Did ye say ye'd made 'oot Alf's address?" he inquired.

"Yes, and I've written it plainly on this sheet of paper to give to Mrs. Gubber," Alice replied.

"Weel, dinna gie it to Mrs. Gubber, gie it to me," Andrew said, "an' I'll ha' a talk wi Gubber himsel'. There's a chance o' some kind, lassie, o' getting word to Meester Peter in a box of food, but I canna say offhand just what it is. Ye maun gie me time to think."

"Oh, Andrew, what a splendid idea! Of course, I never thought of it," Alice replied. "I'll leave you at Mr. Gubber's, and you and he can talk it over. I'll go on for a little drive and come back for you."

Andrew shook his head.

"If I'm tae think I maun walk a bit, put me doon here and I'll go the rest o' the way mysel'," he directed.

Alice stopped and he got out.

"I'll be back for you in an hour or so," she said, and started the car again.

Without giving much thought to the direction she was taking, she jogged along the back country road for a little way, and drew up under a big tree

beside Mystery Meadow, and stopped. It was a clear, warm day, and the shade was welcome.

Alice had not been near the spot since her return from France, and it seemed as though every stick and stone called back memories of Peter. She slipped from her place behind the wheel and stretched out comfortably in the other seat. Her head fell back and she stared up at the leafy branches above her. Picture after picture flashed through her mind. She remembered even the most trivial incidents of their meeting, the funny little things Peter had said to tease her; the excitement of those stolen trips. She looked over at the deserted barn.

"Oh, Peter, Peter, you *must* come back to me!" she whispered miserably, and closed her eyes as if to shut out the old familiar sights.

When she opened them again she looked at the sky, and what she saw made her jump. A familiar speck outlined against the blue was coming towards her. She watched it, fascinated, hardly daring to believe her eyes. It came nearer and nearer and circled uncertainly above a field farther on.

The hum of the engine reached her as it came on into full view.

"Engine trouble, I can tell that," Alice said to herself, as she watched the uncertain movements of the 'plane. She was herself again; the first moment of wonder and hope gave way to practical common-sense.

She watched the 'plane curiously as it chose a spot to land, and saw it volplane down towards her. It lighted rather heavily in a far corner of the field, and the driver climbed out. He inspected his engine and made one or two attempts to start, but failed each time. Alice saw by his uniform that he was a member of the Royal Flying Corps.

"I suppose I've got to go and help you," she said, sliding back into the driver's seat, "but I don't see why you had to come just at this moment, or pick out this particular field to land in," she added crossly to herself.

She turned the car around, turned up a lane that skirted the edge of the field, and was soon just on the other side of the fence from the aeroplane.

"Can't I help?" she called cheerfully. "I see you're in trouble."

The driver of the 'plane took off his cap and came over to her.

"You are very kind, I am sure, to offer," he said, choosing his words with care, "but I fear my machine is beyond your help."

"Oh, I wouldn't be too sure about that," Alice laughed, "I know a lot about engines."

She looked at the man and smiled. He was tall and blonde; his eyes were a light blue and very small, and the lower part of his face was too heavy for the rest of it. Alice decided at once that she did not like him, but he was in trouble and she felt it was her duty to help him.

"Anyway I can run you up to the village in my car and save you a dusty walk," she said, determined to be good-natured and polite.

"Thank you, that's very jolly of you," the man replied, "but may I ask whom I have the honor to address? I am Lieutenant White of the Royal Flying Corps, as you see."

"Oh, I'm Alice Blythe," Alice told him, "and now that we're properly introduced, what can I do for you?"

Lieutenant White smiled for the first time.

"If you can tell me where I can find a hotel

where I can get something to eat, I'll be very greatly obliged," he said, "I've made a long flight and I admit I am very hungry."

"Why, there isn't a place in the village worthy of the name of a hotel," Alice replied, "but if you will, I'll be glad to take you to my aunts'. We don't live far from here, and it's almost tea time, isn't it?"

She unconsciously expected him to look at a wrist watch, and was a little surprised to see that he carried an old fashioned watch in his pocket, with the chain fastened in the buttonhole of his lapel. As he pulled it out and consulted it, the lapel turned over from the weight of the chain.

It was only for an instant, but it was long enough for Alice to see that there was a small blue forget-me-not embroidered beneath it.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE TOWER

IT was fortunate that Alice did not at once realize the importance of her discovery. If she had, it is hardly likely that she would have kept her head and continued the conversation with Lieutenant White. As it was, her thoughts were so confused that she found it almost impossible to keep calm and not show by her expression the tumult that was going on in her heart. All the color left her cheeks, but Lieutenant White did not seem to notice it. He slipped the watch back in his pocket and jumped over the stone wall.

"You are very kind, I am sure, Miss Blythe, and although I dislike having to trouble you so much, I will accept your invitation. My 'plane will be safe here, will it not?"

Alice nodded and forced a smile.

"Yes indeed, it's not likely that any one will see it, and if they do, I assure you none of the natives hereabout know anything about flying."

The Lieutenant smiled, opened the door of the car and took his place beside her, and they started back along the road.

Alice had no formed idea or plan of what she was going to do with the man in the seat beside her. She felt for the moment that she had him more or less in her hands, but the chief thing was not to frighten him.

"Do you know this part of the country at all?" she asked to make conversation.

"Not very well," the officer replied hurriedly. "I have not lived much of my life in England, although, of course, I am perfectly familiar with London and some of the country, you understand."

"Oh, certainly. We're rather tucked away down here," Alice said; "very few people really know this spot at all."

"It is truly delightful; I am glad I discovered it," he replied politely.

"Wonder if you'll say that this time to-morrow," Alice thought to herself.

They were not going very fast. She was purposely taking as long as possible in order to have time to think.

As they passed the road that led to the village,

Alice saw Andrew sitting on a stone waiting for her. She increased her speed a little and passed him with barely a nod, but she made signs for him to follow, with her hand.

When they turned in the gates of Brinsley Hall, the Lieutenant asked: "Is this your place? It's very charming. I really feel myself most fortunate—no end so, in fact," he added with a visible effort.

Alice wanted to laugh, for she realized that he was trying to be very English for her benefit, and his precise stilted way of talking was funny.

"It is a rather nice place," she admitted. "It has an interesting history too, and we're no end proud of the gardens; I'll show them to you while we're waiting for tea."

They stopped at the terrace and Alice tried hard not to limp too much, as she led the way through the Dutch door into the Long Room.

"Do sit down and I'll find some food," she laughed, pointing to a chair.

Lieutenant White looked about him curiously, and after a little hesitation sank into the offered chair.

Alice hurried from the room. It was only a

little after three, and her aunts were still in their rooms taking their afternoon rest. Alice tiptoed to the kitchen—the maids were nowhere in sight—then with a sigh of relief she returned to the Long Room.

"Your watch is fast," she said laughing. "It's really only a little after three, but I've ordered tea; it will be along in a few minutes."

The Lieutenant, who had risen when she entered the room, bowed stiffly.

"It is most unfortunate that I must put you to so much trouble," he said precisely.

"Not a bit of it," Alice assured him. "Would you care to take a turn in the garden while you wait? I can't go with you because of this beastly sprained ankle." She pointed to her foot, shod in a bedroom slipper.

"Oh no, indeed, I am quite comfortable where I am, I thank you," Lieutenant White protested. "Do not cause yourself any anxiety over me, please. Perhaps if you would care to bother, you will tell me something about this part of the country."

"Oh, so you're trying to pump me, eh?" Alice thought to herself, but aloud she said: "Why I'd

be no end glad to. We have some rather interesting places in the neighborhood. But first let me go and hurry up tea a bit, and incidentally my aunts. You see we caught them napping and they're a trifle flurried."

"No, pray don't disturb them," the Lieutenant protested, but Alice left the room.

She did not, however, go to the kitchen or to the aunts' rooms. She limped painfully through the house and down the front driveway. Andrew was already in sight, and she beckoned to him to hurry, and hid behind a big rhododendron bush.

Andrew followed her. Alice pulled him out of sight and whispered excitedly: "That man you saw in my car, Andrew, is a German spy, and he's got on Mr. Peter's uniform. I know it, but I haven't time now to explain how. He's in the Long Room waiting for food."

Andrew for once in his life looked startled.

"What shall we do with him?" Alice continued. "I don't dare let him out of my sight."

It seemed an eternity of minutes before Andrew answered, but when he did he spoke quickly and to the point. Alice nodded when he finished and hurried back to the house.

"Have I been an age?" she asked gayly from the door of the Long Room. "I'm most awfully sorry, but we are so shy of servants—only two left to run this big house—the rest have all gone 'over to munitions,' as they call it."

Lieutenant White sat up straight and became suddenly interested.

"Are there any munition plants about here?" he inquired almost too quietly.

"Yes, indeed," Alice replied, "any amount of them—grubby places, don't you think?—and so awfully dangerous." Then as she saw Andrew step on to the terrace she changed the subject abruptly. "But ammunition is not a nice tea-time topic, is it? Let me show you over the house. I'll wager you'd never believe from the innocent look of the outside that we've a real secret tower. Come over here a second."

The officer evidently thought it best for his own ends to humor her. He got up reluctantly and went over beside the fire place.

Alice pointed to the old shield emblazoned above it, and as he examined it, she slipped her hand along the panel and found the spring. When

"Two very, very big and very strong hands thrust him none too gently through the opening."

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Lieutenant White turned to her, his back was towards the door, and he did not see Andrew.

"That's very interesting, I'm sure," he said politely, "but about these munition—"

He got no farther, for Alice, at a signal from Andrew, touched the spring; the panel opened slowly, and before the astonished officer realized what was happening, two very big and very strong hands thrust him none too gently through the opening, and he saw the panel close as mysteriously as it had opened.

CHAPTER XIX

HOPES

LIEUTENANT WHITE recovered his senses almost at once and thundered on the door.

"There's no use of ye're doing that," Andrew spoke mildly, his mouth to the panel. "If ye keep still we'll dae ye na harm, but if ye start argy bargying, I'll be forced to treat ye sternly."

Lieutenant White had not the vaguest idea what "argy bargying" meant, but he wisely refrained from further poundings. Alice and Andrew quizzed him uninterruptedly for the rest of the afternoon, and he answered most of the questions they asked him.

"He's the reason for Meester Peter's not writin'," Andrew said at last. "Just how I canna tell, but we'll find oot somehow, and, lassie, I'm thinkin' we're safe in believin' that Meester Peter's alive."

"I think so too from what he says," Alice replied. "But, Andrew, do you think he meant it

when he said that Peter would be shot, if we handed him over to the authorities and news of it reached Germany?"

In the course of the questioning, Lieutenant White had made many such threats calculated to intimidate his jailors. Alice was inclined to believe him, but Andrew was hard to convince.

" 'E's a powerfu' secht o' words, but I'm no' so sure there's much in what he said. However, we'll tak' no chances. Gubber and I arranged a plan this afternoon."

"Oh, tell me," Alice begged.

"Whereby we can send a box," Andrew continued, "containin' food to Alf, to the address he sent."

"Well, go on," Alice insisted.

"Gubber is to write a wee note saying he hopes Alf and his friend enjoy the food, an ordinary note ye ken that will get by the censor, adding the words—'especially ye're Mither's pudding.' "

"Yes, yes, and in the pudding," Alice prompted impatiently.

"In the pudding 'twill be a plum pudding, ye ken, we're goin' to hide a wee compass in one o' the plums."

Andrew stopped, but Alice looked vague, and he went on to explain.

"A compass, lassie, is all that any able-bodied man needs to get out of a small prison camp. In the big ones, of course, it's anither matter, and there's the trouble. If we can get the box to Alf afore he's transferred, there's a good chance that he and Mr. P. may escape—it's the best we can do, lassie, and I'll grant ye it's no' verra much."

"And in the meantime?" Alice asked, pointing to the door.

"In the meantime, we'll keep our fine friend where he is," Andrew replied.

"But how will we feed him?"

Andrew scratched his head. "That's a serious question," he said, "but it's no great matter. If we canna think of a safe way, he maun go unfed."

Alice, even in her excitement, could not repress a smile.

"When does the box to Alf go?" she asked.

"This verra nicht," Andrew replied as he walked over to the panel again.

In words none too gentle, but which left no doubt as to their meaning, he warned the man

in the tower to keep very still, and left him to understand that if he didn't, he would receive a thrashing worse than even his German imagination could picture. His warning was received in sullen silence, and Andrew left the room with a satisfied smile.

Alice sat down to think. She was frightened, thoroughly frightened, and she watched the panel nervously. Her aunts came down for tea a little later, and she forced herself to talk cheerfully, but one ear was strained listening for a sound from the corner of the room.

After dinner she sent Andrew to Mystery Meadow, and told him to roll the 'plane out of sight into the barn. When he came back she had devised a plan to get food to the prisoner. She waited until her aunts were asleep, and then called Andrew who was waiting on the terrace.

She had a tray stocked with provisions ready on the table and two big thermos bottles filled with water. It was not a tempting meal, for it consisted mostly of food in jars, and several boxes of crackers; two loaves of bread and a plate of cold meat.

"It's much for a German," was Andrew's comment.

"But it's got to last for goodness knows how long," Alice reminded him, and she explained her plan.

The only other outlet from the tower was through a small room at the top of the house that Peter had used long ago as his own particular snuggery. A panel behind a bookcase opened much the same way as the one in the Long Room. Alice told Andrew to go up to that door and wait.

Then she went over to the panel beside the fireplace and called.

"Lieutenant White," she said, when a sullen voice answered her, "if you will go upstairs to the very top of the tower, Andrew will give you your dinner," she explained. "Now please don't argue," she continued, interrupting a volley of exclamations, "and if I were you I wouldn't keep Andrew waiting too long, he might get tired, and then you'd be without your dinner. And oh, by the way, while we're talking, I may as well add that we don't intend keeping you here any longer than necessary, and if you behave and don't make

a noise, I hope that in a few days we will have come to some solution. It's possible that we may let you go on account of my cousin, you know—now go upstairs and get your dinner. I don't want to hear what you have to say, I'm not interested.''

She waited breathlessly and before very long she heard the thud, thud of his boots as he ascended the stairs. When she was sure he was almost to the top, she pressed the spring of the panel and slipped the tray inside the tower. Then she touched the spring and the panel closed.

Up at the top of the house, Andrew was carefully explaining to Lieutenant White that it was all a mistake and that he would find his dinner at the bottom of the stairs.

All that night the old Scotchman sat in the garden and kept watch, while Alice curled up on the sofa in the Long Room and did her best to sleep.

CHAPTER XX

NEWS AT LAST

ONE week later found them both at their same posts. The box had been sent, but no news of either Peter or Alf had come. Alice looked tired and worn out. There were heavy circles under her eyes that she had a hard time explaining away to the aunts, and a grim look had settled around the corners of Andrew's mouth.

He refused to give up hope, but as Alice settled herself on the sofa on this particular evening, she was planning how best to explain the situation to her father, for she had made up her mind to face defeat, she could not bear the endless waiting any longer. Even the repeated threats of the German that Peter would surely be killed failed to rouse her. Her hopes were dead; she sure would never see Peter again anyway, and the ultimate fate of Lieutenant White did not matter.

Thus she argued, as she tried to find a comfort-

able position for her head on the stiff arm of the sofa. But when the sound of carriage wheels on the drive came to her, and she heard Andrew's voice from the terrace, she jumped up excitedly, a new hope in her heart.

"What is it?" she called softly. "Oh, it's the Major." Her voice fell as she recognized the Chetwoods' dogcart. "What are you doing out at this hour of the night?"

"My dear child, I've news, the most extraordinary news for you," the Major replied excitedly, climbing out of the rig. "Your father called me up from London not twenty minutes ago. We were all sound asleep—yes, sound asleep—he's had a wire from Peter's Colonel. The boy's safe and on his way home. Think of it, my dear, not dead at all! Your father said he knew I'd bring over the message. Your not having a 'phone in—great mistake, that—but no matter, I was only too glad to come. There—there, you mustn't let it upset you so!" he continued, as Alice, once she had sifted the real meaning of the Major's words, threw herself into Andrew's arms and burst into tears.

"It's a wee bit o' a shock, sir," Andrew said

gently, "and comin' sudden like, it has upset her a bit. Did the Doctor say how Meester Peter came back?" he inquired.

"Yes, yes, of course—most extraordinary—really, you know, Andrew," the Major answered; "he escaped from a prison, you know, with another chap. By Jove! I was forgetting that—important too. The other chap was Alf Gubber—just fancy—our Gubber's boy. His mother must know of course."

"I'll tell her, sir," Andrew interrupted quietly, "i' the mornin' early. There's no use scarin' her, sir, she's no verra strong. That's ma brave lassie," he continued as Alice lifted her head from his shoulder and wiped her eyes.

"How silly of me to cry," she said tremulously, "it's not at all a crying matter, is it? Come into the house, Major. I think I'll wait till the morning to tell the aunts. It's safer, I think."

"Thank you, no, my dear, I'll be going back to bed," the Major replied. "Did I tell you, Peter was expected to arrive to-morrow?"

"Yes, in London," Alice said, "and that means unless he's ill that he will come straight down here. Oh, Major, I can hardly believe it."

"No, of course not—very sudden but—splendid, eh? I tell you I was as excited as you are—could hardly talk to your father, you know."

"Come down in the morning," Alice called as he drove off in the dogcart.

"Oh, Andrew! Andrew!" she exclaimed when he was out of hearing, "am I dreaming?"

"No, lassie," the old man replied, "you're no dreamin'. Meester Peter will soon be here, and that base imposter," he added in an entirely different tone, "will ha' his just reward at Meester Peter's hands. It's a gran' thought, lassie, niver forget that."

They talked excitedly for the rest of the night, for sleep was out of the question.

At the first hint of day, Andrew started for the village to tell the Gubbers, and Alice stole back into the house, and tiptoed first to Aunt Seraphina's room. She roused her with a kiss.

"Auntie," she said calmly, "I've got some very good news for you, so get up and come into Aunt Matilda's room, so I can tell you both at once. Hurry up, because it's very, very good news, and I can hardly keep it to myself."

When both the old ladies were quite wide-

awake she continued: "It's about Peter—he's alive and well, and what's more, he's coming home on leave this very day. So get up and hustle into your clothes because—of course—there's just loads to be done, and we want everything in tip-top shape for him. And remember: no tears, he wouldn't like that, he'll feel bad enough at the sorrow he's caused us, and we mustn't make it any harder," she finished, and then she very wisely left them to have their cry out together.

She went down to the Long Room and tiptoed over to the panel, and knocked.

"Oh, Lieutenant White," she called, "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I thought you'd like to know that to-day will be the last day of your visit. We expect a friend of yours down who'll be no end glad to see you," she added mischievously.

"Very well," the Lieutenant replied, "but I warn you, your cousin will be shot."

Alice laughed gayly.

"Now I wouldn't be too sure about that, Lieutenant, really I wouldn't," she replied.

For the rest of the day the wires between Little Petstone and London were kept busy. Alice spent

all of her time at the Central office waiting for news. At a little after two a call came for her, and a voice that she knew above all other voices sounded over the wire.

"Alice, are you there?"

"Oh, Peter, yes, of course. When are you coming down?"

"On the very next train. Will you be at the station?"

"Well, rather!"

"Then good-by, I've just time to make it."

"Good-by."

This was all the conversation, but it was enough.

Alice hurried back to Brinsley Hall in her car to tell her aunts, and was back at the station an hour before the train was due. All the waiting that she had been forced to do in the past crowded month seemed as nothing compared to that hour. Her foot hurt her more than ever, and she could not walk off her excitement, but at last she heard the welcome rumble of the coming train, and in less time than it takes to tell it Peter was on the platform beside her.

Alice had been planning for most of that last

hour what she would say, but every word went out of her head and she just said:

"Peter!"

Peter seemed to consider that enough, for he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I say, this is wonderful! Why, I've dreamed about coming back like this," he said as they drove off in the car, "and now it's happening, I can't believe it."

"It doesn't seem possible, does it?" Alice laughed. "And now, Peter, please tell me all about it. I'm dying of curiosity, and I can't wait any longer. Besides you'd better not talk about it before the aunts. You and Alf got the compass, I know that much—that was Andrew's idea, and now go on."

"Yes, we got it, or rather I did, for of course I happened to bite into the plum that it was hidden in. We'd made a lot of plans, you know, before that came. You see, after that Boche took my uniform, and oh, but I forgot you don't know about that," he interrupted himself. Alice did not contradict him, and he continued, "Well, any way I was stuck into a pig pen with a lot of men—Alf among them—and we had some barbed wire to

keep us there; it was not a regular camp, you know. We were expecting to be moved on any day but luck was with us. Alf and I decided we could get out easy enough if we only knew where our lines were. That's where the compass came in. The very night it came we started off. It was raining, which helped, and we got through the wire without too much trouble and then struck north. Alf wanted to go east. I had an idea in the back of my head, so insisted on going north. We traveled quite a way before daylight. Just as we were deciding to crawl into a ditch and wait for the night, we heard a 'plane above us. We ducked and watched. It was a German machine, and it landed in our field, and the Boche driver got out and began tinkering with the engine. I gave Alf a signal, and—well—the rest isn't very pretty to tell, but after we had finished up the driver and left him rolled in the ditch, we got into the machine, and we didn't stop going until we landed in front of our own Headquarters. What our boys thought when they saw a German 'plane gently landing, I don't know, and any way it doesn't matter. Alf and I got a royal welcome, and ten days' sick leave."

Alice was silent; they had almost reached Brinsley Hall by the time Peter finished his story. She was wondering how best to tell him about the man in the tower.

Her opportunity did not come until late that evening when the aunts, tired out but happy beyond measure at last, went to bed, and Peter suggested a walk in the garden. Alice went out with him and they sat down on the stone bench in the rose garden.

Peter found her hand and held it. After a little silence he said unexpectedly, "By Jove, Alice, you're rather splendid, know that, and I do like the way your hair grows over your ear."

Alice laughed happily, then Peter went on seriously: "There's only one thing that spoils all this, and that's that a Boche wearing my uniform, and driving one of our 'planes, is at large somewhere. I haven't told you, but my 'plane came down behind the lines. I was unconscious, and when I came to, I found my uniform gone, and later I saw a man go up in my 'plane with it on. If I could only get a hold of him I'd give ten years of my life."

Alice got up and went over towards the terrace and called Andrew.

"Mr. Peter says he'd give ten years of his life if he could get our friend in the tower, Andrew. Do you want them?"

"Na, na, Meester Peter may keep all his years," Andrew laughed, "but I'll no deny that I'll be sorry to gie up yonder German."

Peter jumped to his feet. "What under the sun are you two talking about?" he demanded.

Alice explained in as few words as possible.

"But how did you know it was my uniform?" Peter asked wonderingly.

"By the blue forget-me-not, of course," Alice replied calmly; "how else would I know?"

Peter did not reply. He beckoned Andrew to follow, and not many minutes later he had the pleasure of seeing the man who wore his uniform standing before him, his hands held high above his head.

"So you're Lieutenant White, are you?" he demanded.

A gruff affirmative answered him. The German's nerves had been sorely tried for the last few days and he was very angry.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked with an attempt at bravado that was decidedly out of place in his present state of surrender.

"Well, first I'm going to ask you a few questions," Peter replied. "First of all what do you know about the man whose uniform you are wearing?"

There was no answer, the German regarded his questioner sullenly.

"Na, Na, Maister Peter, that's no the way to gae aboot it, if you'll no mind I'll ask him that question ma sel."

Peter nodded. "Go ahead, Andrew," he said smiling.

The old Scotchman turned to the prisoner.

"Did ye ken aught of the man that wore that uniform afore you did?" he demanded, his deep set eyes burning like coals of fire.

"Ye maun better tell me the truth for I ken the answer ma sel, and it'll dae ye na gude to lee aboot it."

The German did exactly what the wily Andrew wanted him to. He doubted the truth of this last assertion and to find out if he was right he fell into the trap and answered the question.

"Lieutenant St. John was the Englishman that wore this uniform," he said. "I told you that before, or rather, she—" he nodded towards Alice, —"discovered it, but what I didn't tell you was that Lieutenant St. John was dead when the uniform was taken from him," he lied, and watched the effect of his words.

Peter stepped on Andrew's foot as a signal to keep silent; and turned to the German.

"So St. John is dead, is he?" he inquired.

"Yes," the German's lips curled, and his small eyes gleamed maliciously, "he's dead."

"Then you only threatened me to scare me, eh?" Alice inquired. "He wasn't being held as hostage for your safety?"

"No, he wasn't, but there are plenty of men who are." The German spoke harshly, "and I warn you if you give me up, not one, but a hundred of your soldiers will lose their lives."

"Tosh, man!" Andrew exclaimed, in admiration, "but ye've a grand imagination, yestereven it was just ane, and noo it's a hundred, ye fair tak ma breath away."

Peter and Alice consulted in undertones.

"He's never seen me before," Peter said, "and

now that I come to think of it, that's very likely—rather a good joke, isn't it?''

''No,'' Alice replied decidedly, ''it is not. What are you going to do with him?''

''Run him up to London to-night,'' Peter replied; ''he's too dangerous to keep down here, and besides the sooner he's out of that uniform the happier I'll be.'' He turned to Andrew.

''We'll just take a little ride, Andrew,'' he said, ''if you don't mind, and on the way we'll stop and get Alf Gubber. I know he'll be glad to go along and make up the even number.''

''Don't you want me to drive the car?'' Alice asked. ''I can, you know, and—''

Peter interrupted her.

''Certainly not,'' he said; ''you go up to bed, we'll take care of Lieutenant White—this is a man's job, my dear,'' he added with a condescension that infuriated Alice.

''But when will you be back, and where are you going?'' she asked, putting the question that concerned her most first.

''Oh, I'll be back to-morrow,'' Peter replied. ''I'll just see the Lieutenant comfortably settled for the night and then I'll go over to Aunt Grace's.

You see, I'll be rather an important witness and I may be needed in the morning, but I'll hurry."

"Who are you?" the German demanded. His slow mind was just beginning to grasp a certain possibility.

Alice laughed and Peter turned to Andrew.

"Introduce me," he said.

"Wi pleasure, laddie," Andrew replied. He turned to the German.

"Man, this is a solemn minute and I hope you'll no forget it," he said. "This is Lieutenant St. John, the same lad ye saw lying dead. Is that no a strange thing to witness?" he chuckled.

The German did not reply, the humor of the situation did not strike him. He hung his head and followed Peter to the car. He did not speak again until he was safe in the hands of the authorities.

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNDERSTANDING AT MYSTERY MEADOW

"A LETTER for you, my dear," Aunt Seraphina said, a few days later, as she came out to the terrace where Alice was sitting alone.

"For me, Auntie? How nice! Why it's from Helen Carey!" she exclaimed, opening the envelope. "How jolly of her. She says—

"Dear Alice,

"No time for that long overdue letter, but I must rush off a few lines. So much has been happening—but first, I am so glad that Lieutenant St. John is all right. Dr. Jepson told me, and—well, I can just imagine how you feel.

"I have seen Allen. Did you ever know such luck! He was wounded—not seriously, thank goodness,—when the Engineers joined in that thrilling fight. He's at Fleurette, and I went over to see him, and—but I mustn't get sentimental, I haven't time, but of course, I'm awfully, awfully happy. There's a new nurse over at Fleurette, a little French girl named Valerie Duval. She has short hair and oh, my dear, she has done the most thrilling things you ever heard of. Even Marie-

ken has to take a back seat when she begins telling of her adventures. I'll give you a detailed account some day, if I've—''

Alice's reading was suddenly interrupted for two hands covered her eyes.

''Peter, how rude of you!'' she said laughing.

''Who's your letter from?'' Peter demanded.

''Helen Carey, she's discovered a little French girl.''

''Oh, who cares?'' Peter said calmly, taking the letter away from her.

''Nothing matters except you and me, and the fact that we're going for a little spin to Mystery Meadow. Come along.''

Alice snatched her hat and followed him to the stable. Peter drove and they did not say very much until they had stopped under the big tree by the wall. Then Peter turned in his seat and looked hard at his companion.

''Alice,'' he said very gravely, ''I'm about to propose to you. Now please do not interrupt me, because I'm rather flustered, and I've forgotten the hang of what I planned to say, but—well—here's the gist of it. I love you very much, and will you marry me some day after this beastly

war is over? Now please say yes, because if you don't I'll be no end disappointed. You see I really do love you, dear," he added gently.

Alice looked up at him and laughed softly.

"You know I will, Peter," she said; "that was all settled ages ago, as far back as yesterday."

"Oh, was it?" Peter asked surprised.

"Of course. Didn't you know?" Alice asked. "Oh, what simpletons men are!" she added, burying her head on his shoulder.

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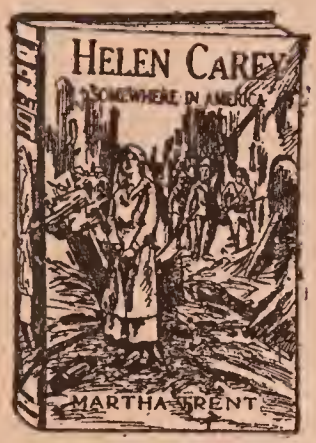

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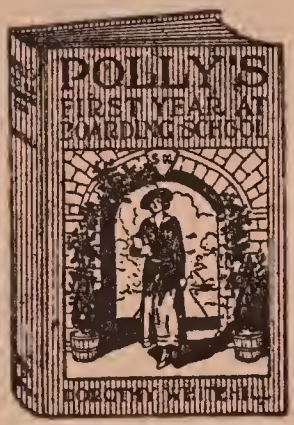

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